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Books on the Theatre by George Jean Nathan

Mr. Nathan, who is the authority on the American theatre and drama for the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and the *Britannica Book of the Year*, has published the following books on the subjects:

- Testament of a Critic*
Art of the Night
The House of Satan
The Autobiography of an Attitude
Since Ibsen
Land of the Pilgrims' Pride
Materia Critica
Comedians All
The Popular Theatre
The Critic and the Drama
The Theatre, the Drama, the Girls
The World in Falseface
Mr. George Jean Nathan Presents
Another Book on the Theatre
The Avon Flows
Passing Judgments
The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan
The Theatre of the Moment
The Morning After the First Night
Encyclopædia of the Theatre
The Entertainment of a Nation
The Theatre Book of the Year, 1942-43
The Theatre Book of the Year, 1943-44

Books on Mr. Nathan

- The Dramatic Criticism of George Jean Nathan*, by Constance Frick, M.A.
The Theatre of George Jean Nathan, by Professor Isaac Goldberg, Ph.D.
The Quintessence of Nathanism, by Vladimar Kozlenko.
Three Prejudices: A Study of the Nathan Critical Credo,
by Isabel Barclay Dobell (in preparation).

The Theatre Book of the Year

1944  1945

The THEATRE Book OF THE YEAR

1944 ♦ 1945

A Record and an Interpretation

B Y

GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

ALFRED



A. KNOPF

NEW YORK : 1945

Foreword

THE SEASON was notable, first, for an unparalleled box-office prosperity; secondly, for the continued poverty in drama of authentic quality; and, thirdly, for a persisting emphasis upon the lighter entertainment fare. The public response to this last was such that, in one winter week alone, the combined intake of the musical shows on view amounted to more than 436,000 dollars. And many of the plays that catered to the amusement taste were relatively quite as successful.

It was thus that, while the theatre offered the serious drama critic very little over which to exercise his talents, it nevertheless periodically afforded him a good time, which was embarrassing. A serious critic, by the dictates of tradition, is not supposed to have any such good time, that is, save in the presence of drama of deep merit, which frequently has a lamentable way of being very tragical and which, while it auspiciously purges his soul in the higher directions, is not calculated to make him especially jolly about the immediate world and his comfort in it.

I am not defending the kind of plays which, on the other hand, entertained him considerably. They no more call for defense, at least in this critical opinion, than a very pretty girl who happens to be a little dumb, or a good Limburger sandwich, or even a traveling salesman story which succeeds in making one laugh. I may wish for plays of greater repute and I may wish for them heartily, as I do; but mere entertainment, as it is condescendingly designated by the pundits, has something to recommend it too, just as occasionally the cup that cheers has or, under certain circumstances, a nocturnal hansom cab ride through the Park, or playing with one's pet dog.

Foreword

Take, for example, some such play as Mary Chase's *Harvey*. The critic, however scholastically solemn, who would say that he does not hugely enjoy it is, presuming him to exist, a liar, a fraud, and a menace to the body politic. It may be perfectly true that it is many levels below the high shelf occupied by drama of lasting worth and importance, but it nonetheless provides an evening that is definitely gustful and diverting. What is more, it does not lack intelligent observation and the humor derived from such observation. Treating, as you will subsequently be reminded, of a tosspot who meets up in alcoholized imagination with a large rabbit named Harvey and who thereafter embraces him as a boon crony, and of his concerned relatives who would lodge him in a sanitarium by way of exorcising the rabbit and restoring their brother to normal, it is now and again touched with a worldly wit and wisdom not always encountered in plays of greater critical size. "Nobody," philosophically allows the tosspot, "ever brings anything little into a bar." "You have to be very intelligent in this world — or very pleasant," meditates his elderly sister. And, in further instance, thus finally to the latter the taxi driver who has brought the toper out to the sanitarium: "Listen, lady, I've been drivin' this route fifteen years. I've brought 'em out here to get that stuff and drove 'em back after they had it. It changes 'em. On the way out here they sit back and enjoy the ride. They talk to me. Sometimes we stop and watch the sunsets and look at the birds flyin'. Sometimes we stop and watch the birds when there ain't no birds and look at the sunsets when it's rainin'. We have a swell time and I always get a big tip. But afterward — whew! They crab, crab, crab. They yell at me to watch the brakes, watch the intersections. They got no faith — in me or my buggy — yet it's the same cab, the same driver, and we're goin' back over the very same road. . . . Lady, after this, he'll be a perfectly normal human being, and you know what bastards *they* are!"

And the tosspot and his Harvey are wisely allowed to go on their former mellifluous way.

The Late George Apley, dramatized from the J. P. Mar-

quand novel by Mr. Marquand and George S. Kaufman, was another small benefaction. It may have its critical defects, even on its own light terms, but it similarly tendered the professor a pleasant holiday from the classroom.

Here, as you will be further reminded, is the theme of the relentless austerity of the old Boston Brahmin tradition in conflict with the younger generation. The play emphasizes this theme out of proportion to the novel and enters into certain jocosities which are somewhat foreign to the book, but on the whole, for all the liberties, it amounts to highly acceptable "mere entertainment" that marks a welcome escape from things like Piscator's production of *King Lear*, Margaret Webster's of *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Tempest*, and similar papier-mâché knife stabs at dramatic art.

There was a measure of relieving amusement to be had, also, in even so synthetic an exhibit as the Norman Krasna-Moss Hart *Dear Ruth*, albeit it was properly to be waved aside the next morning as a sheer Broadway box-office concoction. But deliberate Broadway box-office concoction or not, it nevertheless at intervals stubbornly assaulted the midriff. No stuff for Schlegel, perhaps, but even Schlegel, recall, sank to the depths of defending that comical atrocity, the play upon words. "Those who cry out against the play upon words as an unnatural and affected invention," he declared, "only betray their own ignorance of original nature."

And these were not all that recalled the great man who once said, "He who is ashamed of his laughter makes others ashamed of his poverty of intelligence." There is a place for everything in this world — and a good, loud, healthy, ceiling-rattling laugh never hurt anyone, even a critic.

In the way of serious dramatic quality, the season had to content itself in the matter of new plays mainly and relatively with the Messrs. Richardson's and Berney's *Dark of the Moon*, a treatment of the Barbara Allen folk legend at times racily imaginative and intermittently sprayed with some verbal radiance, though there were many who es-

teemed Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* more highly.

Among the disappointments of the year was the municipally controlled City Center Theatre. The founded intention of the enterprise, as everyone knows, was to bring fine drama and fine musical exhibits to the masses at prices within their means and so encourage and develop in them a growing love for the theatre, to the latter's potential great prosperity. That the plan was a worthy one and promised the enterprise a future place among the angels of Heaven was to be admitted, and with cheers. But that, whether in the case of drama or musical shows, it up to date has panned out, is more than dubious.

Just how an incipient profound attachment for the theatre may be instilled in the City Center's customers by the great majority of the second-hand dramatic dispensations and shabby musical presentations which it thus far has offered them is difficult to figure. Aside from a meritorious revival of the familiar *Little Women*, its season's dramatic program delivered only a run-down showing of the feeble *Harriet*, brought in from the 1942-1943 Broadway season; the sorely defective LeGallienne-Webster revival of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, brought in in turn for a week's run after a road engagement, from the 1943-1944 Broadway season; and a very poor revival, with a company headed by Fred Stone, of *You Can't Take It With You*, from the 1936-1937 Broadway season. There was nothing else.

Since it hopefully threw open its doors to capture audiences which hitherto had been strangers to the theatre and which had necessarily confined themselves, because of high admission charges, to the low-priced moving pictures, the City Center has further proffered six musical items. Of the six, only one, a revival of *Porgy and Bess*, has been sufficiently professional and impressive to promote in the audiences any respect for the theatre and to induce in them any warm inclination to forsake the screen parlors.

Consider the rest from the viewpoint of proficiency. *The New Moon* was shown in so slipshod a production that City Center audiences who had heard of its previous big success

in the theatre could not even vaguely understand the reason for it, and speculated that, if this was the kind of thing the theatre esteemed, the theatre could be hardly what it had been cracked up to be. The revival of *The Merry Widow*, which had enjoyed a record run of 321 performances at the Majestic Theatre, in its City Center manifestation suffered such a let-down and was generally so unsatisfactory that the customers again scratched their heads and again were besieged by skepticism as to the touted grandeur of the theatre.

With the appearance of *The Gypsy Baron* in a production so tawdry that even an old-time Cincinnati beer-garden would have gagged at it, their doubts over the much heralded glories of the theatre increased by leaps and bounds. And when *La Vie Parisienne* came along in a production that for the most part was approximately as gaily Parisian as Tolstoi, the doubts resolved themselves into something closely approaching complete conviction. Nor were the doubts materially lessened when, finally, the originally excellent *Carmen Jones* appeared in cut-down road production shape, and at prices only slightly lower than those charged for the Broadway production.

The Broadway theatre is not, true enough, invariably superior to the City Center in respect to musical exhibits. One has only to observe the productions of things like *A Lady Says Yes* to appreciate the fact. But four times out of five, even at its poorest, it is so considerably superior in the way of productions that to compare the City Center with it is like comparing a meal at Sloppy Moe's to one at the Colony.

Censorship again reared its feared head when License Commissioner Paul Moss brought about the closing of the play *Trio* by refusing an extension of the license of the theatre in which it was showing unless the play were withdrawn. Mr. Moss announced that he had received complaints against the exhibit from many persons and was therefore constrained to act as he did. These many persons boiled down, by his own admission, to exactly sixteen. In other words, the objection of sixteen people out of all the

In connection with *Trio*, this Moss declared, "There are various other plays and musicals which border on the line of indecency and the managers are warned that this must not continue. There is a war going on and every effort must be made to prevent the letting down of the bars to indecent performances. The reputation of New York City is at stake, especially since we have here the greatest aggregation of theatres in the world." One such theatre in New York City is the municipally operated City Center, with which he is associated in an official capacity. If the reputation of New York City is at stake, as he says, let him be reminded that the stage of that theatre with which he is connected has offered in various plays and musicals a sufficiency of illicit sexual relationships, profane language, and highly suggestive dances. It might have been a good idea for him to look to his own nest.

It seems, however, that Mr. Moss did not and does not know real smut when it appears, and hence, when it came to censorship, could not be trusted even by Mayor La Guardia and others who were his champions. The scene in Mae West's *Catherine Was Great* involving Mae and one of the actors in a bed was one of the dirtiest scenes shown on the New York stage in years, yet he did nothing about it. *School For Brides* was chock full of smut, yet again he did nothing about it. In *Laffing Room Only!* there was a homo-sexual episode that should properly have been offensive to him, yet still again he did nothing about it. What he did was rather to bring about the suppression of a play which he termed "lewd and lascivious" and which contained not one single word or scene that was anywhere nearly so objectionable.

Something, in conclusion, is rotten not only in Denmark when a Postmaster General has been able to hold up the mailing privileges of a reputable national magazine simply because it contained the kid word "backside" and when a minor political appointee in New York City has been able single-handed to censor off the stage a play with a theme that down the centuries has figured in illustrious poetry, literature, and drama.

Widespread indignation over the *Trio* episode resulted, however, in plans to set into motion legal measures curbing Moss' future independent censorship activities and the giving over to the consideration of the courts and juries the matter of suppressions of plays following reputable complaints against their infractions of morals.

It is, finally, a favorite outcry of non-New Yorkers that New York does not theatrically represent the nation, that its taste is not necessarily that of the rest of the nation and that, inferentially, the taste of the rest of the nation is immeasurably superior, indeed so closely identified with the dramatic classics that the occasional view of a Broadway company performing some low commercial item like, say, *Boy Meets Girl* is enough to induce a comprehensive nausea, accompanied by fainting spells. So definitive is the mortification that even some New Yorkers have themselves come to believe it and have lent their sympathetic voices to a plea for a national theatre which might truly represent the country and thus relegate Broadway to its proper place, somewhere down the end of the line near the sewer.

It is a pert notion and one to fascinate the attention, like a flea circus. But though, like a flea circus, it has its diverting points, it further like a flea circus does not make much sense.

That New York has its faults of taste along with the other American communities is fully to be granted. But when it comes to comparative values it still stands generally, despite such episodes as *Trio*, as the most liberal, the most hospitable, and the most endorsable theatrical center in the nation, and its taste, all things duly considered and weighed, as in the aggregate relatively the best in the nation. No other city has in the last twenty years or more corrected New York when New York has now and again ignorantly dismissed a play of quality. No other city, proportionate to its population, has so fully endorsed estimable plays. And no other city, for all New York's occasional deplorable coldness, has encouraged creditable new, young playwrights so often.

The idea, dispensed by various profound thinkers in the

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Honor List

THE BEST NEW DRAMATIC PLAY:

DARK OF THE MOON,

by Howard Richardson and William Berney

THE BEST NEW COMEDY:

HARVEY, by Mary Chase

THE BEST NEW MUSICAL:

CAROUSEL, by Oscar Hammerstein II and
Richard Rodgers

THE BEST MALE ACTING PERFORMANCE:

LEO G. CARROLL, in *The Late George Apley*

THE BEST FEMALE ACTING PERFORMANCE:

LAURETTE TAYLOR, in *The Glass Menagerie*

THE BEST ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE:

THE COMPANY in *The Glass Menagerie*

THE BEST STAGE DIRECTOR:

JOHN VAN DRUTEN, in *I Remember Mama*

THE BEST SCENE DESIGNER:

JO MIELZINER, in *The Glass Menagerie*

THE BEST COSTUME DESIGNER, DRAMATIC:

LUCINDA BALLARD, in *I Remember Mama*

THE BEST COSTUME DESIGNER, MUSICAL:

MILES WHITE, in *Bloomer Girl*

THE BEST STAGE LIGHTING:

JO MIELZINER, in *The Glass Menagerie*

The Theatre Book of the Year
1944 ☙ 1945

The Year's Productions

DREAM WITH MUSIC. MAY 18, 1944

A musical fantasy, book by Sidney Sheldon, Dorothy Kilgallen and Ben Roberts, lyrics by Edward Eager, music by Clay Warnick. Produced by Richard Kollmar for 28 performances in the Majestic Theatre.

PROGRAM

(In Reality)

ELLA	Betty Allen	WESTERN UNION BOY	Alex Rotov
MARIAN	Joy Hodges	MICHAEL	Ronald Graham
DINAH	Vera Zorina	ROBERT	Robert Brink

(In the Dream)

SCHEHERAZADE	Vera Zorina	PERFUME MERCHANT	
JASMIN	Joy Hodges	FAIR	Robert Beam
SULTAN	Robert Brink	CANDY SALESMAN	Michael Kozak
WAZIER	Alex Rotov	MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MERCHANT	Bill Jones
MISPAH	Marcella Howard	SNAKE CHARMER	John Panter
HISPAH	Janie Janvier	SAND DIVINER	Byron Milligan
RISPAH	Lois Barnes	SINBAD	Ralph Bunker
TISPAH	Lucille Barnes	MRS. SINBAD	Leonard Elliott
FISPAH	Jane Hetherington	GENIE	Betty Allen
KISPAH	Donna Devel		Dave Ballard
ALADDIN	Ronald Graham		
RUG MERCHANT	Ray Cook		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. Dinah's apartment. Scene 2. The palace of Shariar, King of the Indies. Scene 3. A street in the bazaars of Bagdad. Scene 4. Sinbad's garden. Scene 5. A corridor in Sinbad's house. Scene 6. The magic carpet. Scene 7. In the clouds. Act II. Scene 1. Aladdin's forest — China. Scene 2. Aladdin's game preserve. Scene 3. The corridor — Sinbad's. Scene 4. Aladdin's palace. Scene 5. The corridor — Sinbad's. Scene 6. The palace of Shariar. Scene 7. Dinah's apartment.

THIS WAS the first of the summer interregnum dispensations and once again reflected our producers' conviction that, the moment the warm weather sets in, theatregoers

who previously have enjoyed themselves at such plays as *Hamlet* and *Othello* and such musical exhibits as those of Strauss, Offenbach and Lehár are instantaneously transformed into half-wits who can stand only the kind of drama in which someone, preferably a grandmother, falls downstairs and lands in the goldfish bowl and the kind of musicals in which someone foots someone else at least six times in the buttocks, preferably to tunes stolen from some established previous kleptomaniac. Now and again there may conceivably come a play or a show that falls into a slightly loftier slot, but for the most part what is produced are the sort of plays that, if put on during the chilly months, would freeze to death during the road try-out period, vaudeville shows whose masters of ceremonies make killing cracks about the theatre's cooling system being so proficient that all one has to do to get a mint julep is to suck a peppermint lozenge, and musical shows whose imaginative triumph, like the one here under consideration, consists in bringing on the perspiring chorus girls in furs.

In justification of their esoteric philosophy that the public is deliriously partial to such summer exhibits, the producers customarily offer four points. The first, in their words, is "What's so odd about it? You wouldn't think of putting on other kind of stuff in a season when people are in a holiday mood, would you?" It is futile to ask them to explain why it is then that they put on what they term that other kind of stuff during the Christmas and New Year season when people are equally in a holiday mood. The second is that "people don't like to think in hot weather," to which it might be replied that the sales statistics nevertheless generally indicate that serious books are among the best sellers in the warm months and that the box-office statistics of the period show a continued big trade for such hardly frothy plays as *The Searching Wind*, *Jacobowsky And The Colonel*, *Angel Street*, and *Othello*.

The third point is that the critics become lazy when summer sets in and prefer casual shows which they may review with little effort and, further, that they would never be in the mood for serious things and would clearly indicate their

displeasure in their notices. It would be of no benefit to ask the producers why it is that the kind of things they do put on usually get condemnatory reviews or why they believe that something like a new O'Neill drama, were it to be put on instead, would inevitably get even worse ones. And the fourth is that the public is never so choosey in hot weather and that one can accordingly get away with plays and shows which it would never accept in cold weather. A sufficient answer to this is that, in the ten years preceding the present season, out of a grand total of forty-three new plays produced during the warm weather months from May first on only a single one scored a success with the public, that the great majority, as a matter of record, were dispatched to the storehouse in quick order, and that out of a grand total of twenty-two new musical shows, including the military exhibit, *This Is The Army*, all of seventeen were failures and only five, including *This Is The Army*, were successes.

That something therefore appears to be slightly askew with the ipsedixits' ideology is obvious. And equally obvious is the dubiety of their meteorological calculations. Their idea in this direction seems to be that there is never a single even relatively cool interlude during the warm spell, that it never rains a chill rain, that the nights are invariably hellish, and that it is all one can do from early May until late August to keep from floating down to the sea on the tide of one's own sweat. New York in summer, true enough, isn't always like living inside a gin rickey, but it seems to be the long experience of the rest of us that it isn't on the other hand exactly like living inside a blast furnace. There are many days and nights quite as comfortable for theatregoing as during some of the sleet, slush and snow months — and it is a deal easier to get taxicabs.

The notion that it is much simpler to please audiences in summer than in winter has been responsible over the years for losing the producers many hundreds of thousands of dollars. If anything, it is harder. Far from being in a holiday mood, the average person who finds himself in the city during the summer achieves a certain crankiness and

impatience. That it is generally unwarranted is neither here nor there but, as any observer of human nature will agree, it is nonetheless a pretty well established fact. And when that person goes to the theatre he doesn't go in his more carefree and receptive winter mood but in a determined mood to be shown and to get his money's worth. And as for the vacation visitors to the city, the producers' theory that they are easy prey for any new claptrap that may be put on calls for considerable overhauling. What those visitors in the main go to are not any such summer makeshifts but the big successes of the earlier year about which they have heard and have for some time been eager to see.

Surely neither they nor the town folk gave any encouragement to the theatrical hot weather philosophy of Mr. Kollmar who saw fit to produce this *Dream With Music*, which suffered their absence to a loss of 240,000 dollars and was driven to the storehouse after only twenty-eight performances. Dealing with a female writer of soap operas who dreams she is Scheherazade, it disclosed itself to be a paraphrase of *The Arabian Nights* which sought to merchant the rich flavor of the delightful tales chiefly in terms of overworked stage trapdoors and uphill jokes about the sexual relation. Mr. Kollmar's education does not seem to have included a distaste for such dull, soiled quips. His antecedent production, *Early To Bed*, like his collaborative production before that, *By Jupiter*, contained a copious dose of them and, though it appeared for some eleven months on Broadway, did not in that period make a cent for its backers. He might accordingly well have studied such prosperous shows as *Carmen Jones*, *Mexican Hayride* and the like and learned that while cleanliness may not exactly be next to godliness it is often in these days pretty close to the box-office.

In the preparation of *Dream With Music*, Mr. Kollmar originally sought the services of two witty men who know something about writing: Wolcott Gibbs and Franklin P. Adams. Both were amenable, in the early stages of negotiation. But Mr. Gibbs blanched when the producer looked

askance at any of his humor that was slightly more elevated than such subsequently incorporated jocosities as "He's so influential he could get Errol Flynn a room at the Y.W.C.A." and "I'd hate to lose my head; I'm attached to it." And Mr. Adams went equally pale when he proposed a lyric line containing the word "preface" and was firmly apprised that it was altogether too highbrow and would not be understood by the public.

Small wonder, therefore, that the 240,000 dollars were thrown to the winds and blew the talents of Vera Zorina along with them. The first curtain had not been up ten minutes when all around one heard the groans of the customers. For in that ten minutes the imagination of the producer and his corps of Broadway gilberts had vouchsafed as a token of things to come the above-noted Errol Flynn line, a radio hideously screeching a soap opera, a maid stretched out saucily on a divan and ordering her mistress to answer the door-bell, one of the more decrepit sardonic allusions to a husband, and Zorina herself, that fair creature, strutting brashly about in the role of a concocter of radio commercials.

Among the things that all this betokened and that duly and subsequently put in an appearance was — and one illustration suffices to describe the whole — an episode in which a dwarf tried elaborately to seduce the leading lady.

CAREER ANGEL. MAY 23, 1944

A professional production of the Gerard M. Murray comedy originally shown in the antecedent season in the Blackfriars' Guild Theatre. Produced by the Messrs. Billings, Dicks and Shay to 15 sparse audiences in the National Theatre.

PROGRAM

BROTHER GREGORY	Donald Foster	THOMPSON	Robert Lee
DONNIE MCADAMS	Allen Rich	RINN	Charleton Carpenter
WILLIE GARVEY	Charles Nevil	BRUNO CHEVOSKI	
BROTHER FIDELIS	Ronald Telfer		Michael Dreyfuss
KURT RHEINHOLD	Tony Miller	BARR	Wendell Whitten
BROTHER SERAPHIM		BROTHER UBALDUS	Mason Adams
ANGEL GUARDIAN	Whitford Kane	DUVAL DEVOIS	Dorn Alexander
HURDLES	Glenn Anders	AL FULLER	Gerald Mathews
GLINSKY	Alvin Allen	BILLY	David Kelly
	Robert Ramsen		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Late afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. Three weeks later. Scene 2. Midnight of the same day. Scene 3. The following morning. Act III. One week later.

The entire action takes place in the Superior's office of the Bosco Institute, somewhere in Georgia.

The time is spring — prior to Pearl Harbor.

IT MOST OFTEN in these days is a grievous mistake to bring to Broadway a play which has made a favorable impression when first shown in an amateur theatre. What looks very attractive in such a quarter frequently loses much of its attractiveness, even if recast with professional actors, when it is moved into more sophisticated surroundings. In this respect the play resembles a pretty girl in a small town who captures one's fancy and whom one invites to visit New York. In the small town, where the competition is negligible and where the metropolitan eye is disposed to suspend judgment, the girl in her simple country dress looks like a dream. But, as many men in their day have appreciated, when that same girl in that same dress appears in the big

city not only she and the dress look considerably out of place but what seemed her prettiness in the rural regions doesn't now look half so pretty.

Thus, last season, *Only The Heart*, which may have seemed engaging to some when shown down in the little Provincetown Playhouse, seemed relatively less so to the same persons when it was brought to Forty-fifth Street. And thus again *Career Angel*, for all its much better performance, now didn't look like the same girl it was in its little Blackfriars' Guild home. It remained an amiable play for all its numerous stark deficiencies, but somehow not nearly so amiable as it was in its simple habitat.

A description and criticism of the play appears in *The Theatre Book of the Year, 1943-1944*.

A STRANGE PLAY. JUNE 1, 1944

*A nonesuch by Patti Spears, preceded by a curtain-raiser,
According To Law, by Noel Houston. Produced by Eugene
Endrey for one performance in the Mansfield Theatre.*

PROGRAM

ACCORDING TO LAW

JIM NAILEY	Gregory Robbins	GEORGE RANDALL	Henry Wilson
HENRY TERRY	Robert Harrison	BEN STAGGS	Don Appell
HENRY YANCEY	Windsor Bryan	MRS. HARKNESS	
LUKE	Burton Mallory		Lorraine MacMartin
SENATOR LAWRENCE	Dayton Lummis	HARVEY	Harvey Marlowe
CHARLIE TEAGUE	Wardell Saunders		

Scene. A courtroom. A county seat.

Time. The present. A gray morning.

A STRANGE PLAY

DR. STEPHEN DURYEA	Richard Gordon	PAUL CARTWRIGHT	Herbert Heyes
CLAIRE	Alicia Parnahay	WILLIAM DOUGLAS	Ralph Clanton
		JAMES	Byron Russell
Time. Today.			

T

HE BILL EARNED the proud distinction of being the first production in two years to close after a single performance. The first half, a one-act play designed seriously to picture the cruelty of Southern courts to the Negro, was so confusedly and badly written that it induced an hilarity akin to that of the famous old burlesque courtroom skit, *Irish Justice*, revived in the previous season by Bobby Clark in *Star and Garter*.

The second half, a two-act play, was unintentionally even more hilarious. Confected by a lady radio vocalist and with its scene laid on Long Island, it was as swell as a tidal wave. Nothing quite so touchingly high-toned had been seen

hereabout since Sam T. Jack, the burlesque entrepreneur, some forty-odd years ago first introduced the idea of clothing the Chinamen in a Bowery opium dive skit in full evening dress, with chrysanthemums in their lapels.

The rise of the curtain started things off. Elegantly adorned with immaculately pressed white dinner suits and shirts that evidently hadn't been introduced to a laundry, the gentlemanly actors were beheld lounging luxuriously on Macy divans and Louis Quatorze chairs, the while the sole actress, clad in a pale blue gauze evening gown as ruffled as the show's backer, bade the butler, in turn as tony as a biddle, to pass around the brandy bottle. Not one but four rounds did the butler make, prefacing each pour with the confidential information that what he was putting into the glasses was real, genuine, aged Napoleon brandy, sir.

"Ah, Napoleon brandy!" successively exclaimed each of the recipients, smacking his lips. "Good, rare, old, aged Napoleon brandy!" "Have a care it does not signify your Waterloo!" wittily cautioned the actress, poisoning her own glass fashionably and with connoisseur finesse at her right ear.

"The night breathes romance and passion," thereupon observed an actor who was described as a great dramatist. "The sky billows with dream clouds, the stars are translucent diamonds flirting with the golden moon, and the scent of flowers in the garden carries with it the message of youth and love and desire. But" — after a profound pause — "I am worried. I seem to be unable to evolve an epic idea for my next play. But wait (*sotto voce*), I think I have it! I shall observe these people, my hosts, and dramatize what I shall discern."

What he discerned was his hostess betraying his dear friend, her husband, with a young man. "Aha!" he mused, "my theme shall be shall I tell my dear friend, her husband, or shall I not?" Noting that the wife, husband and lover had now seated themselves at a card table, he eavesdropped their conversation. "I hold the ace," said the lover. "I hold two hearts," said the wife. "Who holds the knave?" inquired the great dramatist with a meaningful inflection

— and, lapsing shudderingly for the moment into proletarian speech, added, "Will the knave cop the queen?"

The rest of the evening was occupied by the great dramatist's imaginings — acted out by the cast — of what would happen, first, if he did not tell the husband; secondly, if he did tell; and, thirdly, if the butler were to tell, necessitating a triple duplication of much the same stage action, God forbid.

The idea, which has seen service in one form or another for years, was so amateurishly handled, what with such lines as the impassioned, romantic lover's "Darling, how could you ever forget Atlantic City!", that the one and only audience howled in derision. The stage direction was by the producer, Mr. Endrey, identified in the program as an Hungarian genius who "had begun producing in Europe, one of his most successful offerings being the novel combination of stage plays with screen continuity, an idea that brought him to America." Although Mr. Endrey did not quite invent what he considers a novel idea, since the combination of a stage play with screen continuity was originally devised in this country by Augustus Thomas and Robert H. Davis in their dramatization of Frank L. Packard's *The Battle Cry*, shown at the old Astor Theatre some thirty-seven years ago, he did on this occasion invent some of the worst direction ever beheld on the local professional stage. And his instruments, the actors, were just as bad.

THAT OLD DEVIL. JUNE 5, 1944

*A comedy by J. C. Nugent. Produced by Lodewick Vroom
for an impecunious 2 weeks' run in the Playhouse.*

PROGRAM

HESTER	Ruth Gilbert	WILBUR BLIME	J. Colvil Dunn
OFFICER WILLIAMSON		LILA MERRILL	Agnes Doyle
	David S. Jordan	MARTHA BLAIR	Luella Gear
JOHN WOODRUFF	Matt Briggs	MRS. WOODRUFF	Ruth Gates
JIM BLAIR	J. C. Nugent	MRS. BLIME	Lou McGuire
DOCTOR DAVIS	Matthew Smith	MRS. ROBINSON	Mary Dickson
HARRY ROBINSON	Warren Lyons	JERRY SWIFT	Michael Ames

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *The living-room of Jim Blair's home, Beechville, Conn. Evening.* Act II. *Same. Next morning.* Act III. *Same. That evening.*

Time. Early September.

MR. NUGENT, the records show, is now over seventy years of age. He has written many plays in his lifetime, all of them of a pious innocence and in the main virtuously eschewing sex. In this, his latest, however, he privileged himself a long deferred fling, as is not uncommon with old boys who previously have led a pure literary life.

For extra measure Mr. Nugent treated himself to the leading role in his spree, just as George M. Cohan did in his own belated spree called *Dear Old Darling*. And did he have himself a time! No more of that bygone nonsense of sitting paternally in front of the fireplace in slippers. No more of that playing hide-and-seek with small grandchildren. No more of that Scriptures reading to the family. Avaunt such gingerless spongecake! Heigh-ho, and on to the fleshpots with the roustabouts, and a beaker of French sauce on the house!

Our venerable friend kicked off the traces, and good. As the hero of his own imagination he presented himself to the customers, who unfortunately for him were few, as a hot dog of the first karat. Though his lifelong morality

stubbornly imposed its qualms upon him and brought him periodically to reassure the audience that he was only spoofing and that he was at bottom the same old chaste Nugent, he didn't fool anybody. He loved himself in his vicarious role. I haven't seen an actor enjoy himself so enormously in years.

There was no stopping his picnic. He made all the other actors on the stage look upon him as the father of the *in-génue's* illegal baby. He necked the pert young household maid and gleefully confided to the rest of the cast that he had basked in the favors of the maid's beautiful younger sister. He had himself anatomically sought after by the wives of all the neighbors, and sighed over as a combination Casanova and Nat Goodwin, with a little De Wolf Hopper and Lou Tellegen thrown in to flavor. He reinspired his young wife with amorous dreams, issued cracks so blue that they made his previous self blush, put down enough gay booze to flood a Johnstown suburb, ogled everything in skirts and permitted himself to be ogled back with a trenchant significance, and conducted himself generally like a Sacha Guitry born in Niles, Ohio. It was wonderful to contemplate, and pathetic.

To see a pleasant and engaging old actor making such a spectacle of himself to what he fruitlessly imagined might be box-office ends wasn't easy on the critical spirit. If his ability as a playwright had been more substantial, it would not have been so bad. But, on this occasion at least, it suggested nothing quite so much as Wilson Collison, author of such creams as *Up In Mabel's Room* and *Getting Gertie's Garter*, collaborating with the Harold Orlob of *Hairpin Harmony*. In other words, Mr. Nugent was smutty without being funny.

The tragedy of theatrical age is that it often tries to bathe itself into line with what it imagines to be contemporary taste and prejudice. Nugent, sweet soul, doubtless imagined that the present, newfangled demand was for naughty sex comedy and, like a lovable old grandpa valiantly trying to dance a jig and impress the youngsters that he is still fit as a fiddle, set himself to write one. But his every effort to

be up-to-date refractorily retained the scent of long-ago camphor balls, and his every attempt to be one of the boys betrayed his mental discomfort. The thing simply wasn't in him, and he offered himself in the light of a Denman Thompson trying to sell the Old Homestead by hanging a red light in the vestibule.

To make bad matters worse, he directed what was essentially a farce in terms of comedy, pacing the action so slowly that the audience was given altogether too much time to meditate the gaping holes. In the central role, furthermore, he allowed himself so much of his established hesitational acting technique that the play frequently had to skirt around him to maintain a semblance of life. As his wife, Luella Gear, that competent comédienne, gave a satisfactory account of herself despite the direction; and as the ingénue Agnes Doyle acted a praiseworthy conviction into a part that in other hands might have seemed a mere roll of wet pink ribbon. For the rest, the company closely resembled one of the lesser pre-war summer barn aggregations.

BROKEN HEARTS OF BROADWAY

JUNE 12, 1944

A travesty of old-fashioned melodrama by Ralph Matson. Produced and withdrawn after 14 performances by Selected Artists, Inc., in association with Alan Corelli, atop the Central Opera House.

PROGRAM

SAL, A FRIVOLOUS SORT OF A GAL <i>Bibi Osterwald</i>	MRS. FAIRADAY, THE CAPTAIN'S SPOUSE <i>Louise Kelley</i>
CAPTAIN FAIRADAY, AN OLD SALT WITH BLUE BLOOD <i>George Spelvin</i>	PRUDENCE FAIRADAY, ALMOST A BROKEN HEART <i>Margaret Linskic</i>
PETER COVERLY, A RICH MAN'S NOBLE SON <i>Derrick Lynn-Thomas</i>	OSMUND BLOWHARD, A WALL STREET SCORPION <i>Steven Cochran</i>
DAISY BLOWHARD, A RICH MAN'S UN-NOBLE DAUGHTER <i>Natalie Hammond Core</i>	SPIDER GIDEON, BLOWHARD'S CRUEL ACCOMPLICE <i>Max Leavitt</i>
TWINKLE FLEETFOOT, A MAN OF THE MOMENT <i>Brian O'Mara</i>	

The action takes place in New York during the great panic of 1895.

PERIODICALLY in the last dozen or so years someone, usually a tyro in the producing profession, has concluded that it would be a great idea to ridicule an old-time melodrama to the accompaniment of beer and pretzels. Supplementary to the great idea has been the even greater one to put on the show in some disused, remote church building, hall or ginmill accessible only to the more intrepid explorers. The present producers, somewhat tardy in the acquisition of the great idea, put on their exhibit on the roof of a disused, remote opera house. Otherwise they offered nothing in the way of novelty.

The playbill as usual bore a chromo of the darksome villain browbeating the tearfully beseeching heroine, invited the audience to hiss the scoundrel and, between the

acts, to join in the "songs of the horse and buggy days." And the stage as heretofore presented a troupe of actors, to uncoin a word, going through the old business of overplaying, with a self-conscious ferocity or coyness, the clichés of the drama of peanut-gallery memory.

It is apparently the persistent theory of the producers of such doings that after a person has had two beers he will have the gay time of his life at almost anything, even something like this *Broken Hearts of Broadway*. Far from me to argue contrarily, considering that all kinds of people seem to enjoy themselves hugely over such parodies of the serious drama as *The Searching Wind* without even a single beer. But when it comes specifically to your recorder it takes a little more than two beers — say maybe a case of Scotch — to loosen up his hilarity at this late theatrical date with any such stale melodramatic travesty.

When the business first began, there was a certain humor in the idea, and hitherto sedate citizens appeared to delight in filling themselves with hops to the point of making derogatory noises at the villain and, in the intermissions, in filling themselves with more hops and singing old Charles K. Harris ballads at the tops of their lungs. But gradually, what with the repetition of the shows, the sport lost its allure and roaring with mirth over some such line as "I have you in me power at last, me proud beauty!" and booing the actor who spoke it, beer or no beer, pretzels or no pretzels, didn't longer seem to constitute a particularly rich and gala time.

The gentlemen responsible for this latest exhibit were consequently a bit too late. Too much beer has passed under the bridge in the intervening years. The only thing that might likely have reinspired their customers' old-time reaction would have been free vodka, by the seidel.

SLIGHTLY SCANDALOUS. JUNE 13, 1944

A comedy by Frederick Jackson. Produced by Charles Leonard in association with Thomas McQuillan for 7 performances in the National Theatre.

PROGRAM

DAVID STUART	<i>Nino Pipitone, Jr.</i>	WAREEF OF FARAK	<i>Ben Shaw</i>
WALTER STUART	<i>William Berens</i>	GENERAL GEORGES RIGAUD	<i>Jean De Briac</i>
JANE	<i>Dorothy Vaughan</i>	JAN LETZARETSZKO	<i>Gene Gary</i>
CONNIE	<i>Elizabeth Burt</i>	SIR MICHAEL NORMAN	<i>Boyd Davis</i>
JAMES WILLOUGHBY	<i>Paul McVey</i>	MRS. HENRY J. CREWE	<i>Francis Carson</i>
FRANCES STUART	<i>Janet Beecher</i>	DAPHNE CREWE	<i>Brooke Shane</i>
MILICENT STUART			
	<i>Anne Henderson</i>		
EDWARD MORROW, JR.	<i>Michael Meehan</i>		
ARCHIE CAMPBELL	<i>Barry Macollum</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Drawing-room of Frances Stuart's home. Westchester, New York. Morning. Act II. Late Friday afternoon. Two weeks later. Act III. The following Sunday evening.

BASED UPON an idea in a play by Roland Bottomley called *Olivia Bows To Mrs. Grundy*, produced in 1932 for a road tryout and never brought into New York, Mr. Jackson's comedy amounts further to a paraphrase, with emphasis upon the sex angle, of the idea in the late John Barrymore's final vehicle, *My Dear Children*, shown locally in 1940. In that play, an aging father entertains three children, each born of a different mother, who have now grown up and seeks to resolve the difficulties they are experiencing with their several romances. In *Slightly Scandalous*, as in *My Dear Children* and as in the earlier Bottomley play, an aging mother entertains three children, each illegitimately born of a different father, who have now grown up and seeks to resolve the difficulties two of them in turn are experiencing with their romances.

The idea, despite overuse, is possibly still a workable one, but the present manipulator has failed it completely, as might not be unanticipated from one who displayed the kind of imagination that originally called his play by such titles as *Are Fathers Necessary?* and *Love And Learn* and could finally achieve nothing more fecund than yet another turn on such already tried and slightly enervating Broadway ones as *Slightly Delirious*, *Slightly Married*, *et al.* Designating the exhibit a play is, indeed, in the nature of flattery, since what Mr. Jackson has negotiated is rather merely a succession of monologues for his leading actress periodically interrupted by his other characters. Of action in almost any sense there is scarcely a trace. The theme obviously also calls for a light wit and a light pace, and the author has omitted the wit save for two or three lines, and his pace is that of a tortoise afflicted with infantile paralysis. His humor, such as it is, furthermore rests largely in such business as a mother's injunction to her small son not to eat any candy lest it spoil his lunch and then seizing the box from him and eating some herself. Which may be allowed to be hardly appropriate to a comedy which strives for the airy Noel Coward sort of thing.

The sedentary direction, in addition, was such that one had the feeling that, if anyone had stolen the stage's couch and chairs, the actors would have found themselves reading their lines lying on the floor.

In a previous section, it has been pointed out that of forty-three plays produced during the warm weather period in the ten previous seasons only one was successful. In the present warm season this production marked the fourth successive failure, bringing the total to forty-six. *Slightly Scandalous*, further, marks still another New York disaster for plays that have been produced with success on the West Coast. *Cry Havoc*, *Slightly Married*, "—But Not Good-bye," *That Old Devil* and many such others which have attracted favorable attention out there have uniformly failed to attract a like attention on Broadway.

FOR KEEPS. JUNE 14, 1944

A comedy by F. Hugh Herbert. Produced by Gilbert Miller for 30 performances in the Henry Miller Theatre.

P R O G R A M

MISS MAXWELL	Zolya Talma	JIMMY McCAREY	Donald Murphy
ANNA	Ellen Maher	NANCY VANDA	Patricia Kirkland
PAUL VANDA	Frank Conroy	CHARLIE	Joseph R. Garry
MR. REAMER	Geoffrey Lumb	FRANK	Grover Burgess
PAMELA VANDA	Julie Warren	NORMA	Joan Wetmore
JUNE	Norma Clerc	TERRY	George Baxter

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Paul Vanda's studio apartment, New York City. Act II. Scene 1. *The same.* Ten days later. Scene 2. *Later that night.* Act III. Scene 1. *The same.* Two weeks later. Scene 2. *A few hours later.*

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HE WARM WEATHER catastrophies, with this production, added up, with but a single break in eleven seasons, to forty-seven and indicated once again that the credo of producers which holds that anything will go with audiences if only their collars are wilting has need of a sizeable and very blue pencil.

Gilbert Miller is fond of telling the story about an encounter with his late, illustrious father, Henry, upon achieving his own first theatrical presentation. "Well, dad," observed Gilbert proudly, "a chip of the old block, eh?" To which his father replied wryly, "Say rather a slice of the old ham." In relation to the production of *For Keeps*, however, papa was wrong, in a way. With it, Gilbert discloses himself to be a chip of the old block, at least in one direction. Henry Miller was particularly fetched by the kind of plays in which a young daughter or ward unwelcomely came back to a not altogether circumspect household and in the end proved herself a happy reforming influence. Gilbert now appears to be following in his footsteps, since *For Keeps* is fundamentally in the line of such of daddy longlegs' favorites as *The Rainbow*, etc. The chief differ-

ence, however, is that daddy's selections had something to recommend them in the way of agreeable entertainment whereas the chip's selection is as dully talkative and uninspired a concoction as the stage has uncovered in quite a time.

When the evening was over, indeed, the only recollection one had of it was of young Patricia Kirkland occupying the stage for two steady hours and chattering away for dear life, about nothing. At two points during the session one of the other characters impatiently proclaimed, "You talk too much!", thus usurping to himself the province of the reviewers, which if it keeps up isn't going to be particularly comfortable for the latter, who rely on being paid for such things. Miss Kirkland battled with her difficult assignment valiantly, and came off moderately well as an actress, if unavoidably as something of a bore. But someone should tell her that eyes made up like indigo billiard balls do not lend themselves to attractive facial expression. A number of the company, in fact, had so much sickly blue makeup smeared on their lids that the spectacle was less that of human beings indulging in oral intercourse than of so many decayed meatballs animated by Walt Disney.

TAKE A BOW. JUNE 15, 1944

A variety show, originally called Slap Happy. Produced for 14 performances by Lou Walters in the Broadhurst Theatre.

PRINCIPALS

Jay C. Flippen, Chico Marx, Cross and Dunn, Raye and Naldi, Gene Sheldon, the Murtah Sisters, Pat Rooney, Think-a-Drink Hoffman, the Whitson Brothers, Johnny Mack, and Loretta Fischer.

MR. WALTERS' attempt to revive vaudeville took the following form:

8:40 p.m. — Some chorus girls came on and nasalized a song called "Take A Bow," the lyric having to do with the grand performers who were to follow and who would surely have to take bows for their wonderful talents.

8:45 — Jay C. Flippen, the master of ceremonies, appeared and exchanged some badinage with Chico Marx, seated in a box, as to what they should do to make the show amusing. They allowed, with a skittish facetiousness, that they didn't know.

8:55 — Gene Sheldon, assisted by Loretta Fischer, did his old, familiar banjo and pantomime act.

9:10 — Flippen reappeared in a different suit, cracked an old smoking-car joke, and wound up with a supposedly comical song.

9:18 — A tap dancer named Johnny Mack, backed by the girls, went through his routine.

9:25 — Chico Marx and Sheldon merchanted the old poker game business from *The Cocoanuts*.

9:30 — Flippen reappeared in another suit and cracked another old blue joke.

9:34 — Cross and Dunn harmonized after their established twenty-year-old pattern.

9:44 — Flippen again in another suit. Observing one of the showgirls, he cracked, "A She Grows In Brooklyn."

9:48 — White-haired old Pat Rooney, celebrating his fiftieth year on the vaudeville stage, executed a jitterbug dance with one of the chorus girls, and almost collapsed.

9:55 — Flippin, in another suit, cracked another mildewed joke and introduced Think-a-Drink Hoffman.

9:57 — Hoffman did his familiar turn producing various drinks from an apparently empty pitcher and a pair of cocktail shakers, spilling most of them on his assistants and on the members of the audience who were seated down front.

10:05 — Flippin, in yet another suit, walked on and announced, "Now we'll have a short intermission so the ladies can go to the ladies' room."

Intermission.

10:15 — The chorus girls again came on and performed a dance number called "The Hollywood Jump," consisting of leaps into the air and a wild waving of arms.

10:20 — Flippin in another suit and with another maizey joke.

10:22 — Gene Sheldon reappeared and burlesqued a classical dance. He followed this with his old act of listening with mock rapture to a woman making a speech about him.

10:33 — A pair of ballroom dancers, Raye and Naldi, tossed each other around.

10:45 — A sister act, the Murtahs, "in a cycle of their inimitable songs," harmonized like a trio of darling coyotes.

10:52 — Flippin in another creation and with another joke that Abe Lincoln didn't laugh at.

10:55 — Chico Marx and his twenty-year-old piano act.

11:08 — The Whitson Brothers, acrobats.

11:15 — Flippin again in another choice sartorial confection: "Now goodnight, ladies and gentlemen, and come again soon."

ANNA LUCASTA. JUNE 16, 1944

A play by Philip Yordan, adapted by Abram Hill and Harry Wagstaff Gribble. Produced by the American Negro Theatre group for 19 performances in the 135th Street Library Theatre.

P R O G R A M

NOAH	Lionel Monagus	STANLEY	John Proctor
JOE	Alvin Childress	ANNA	Hilda Simms
RUDOLPH	Earle Hyman	BLANCHE	Alice Childress
CATHERINE	Letitia Toole	EDDIE	Martin Slade
TERESA	Alberta Perkins	DANNY	Billy Cumberbatch
FRANK	Frederick O'Neal	LESTER	Buddy Holmes
STELLA	Betty Haynes		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The Lucasta living-room, Pennsylvania, early 1941.* Scene 2. *Noah's bar, Brooklyn, the same night.* Act II. *The Lucasta living-room, evening, four days later.* Act III. Scene 1. *The Lucasta living-room, three days later.* Scene 2. *Noah's bar, Brooklyn, a week later.*

THIS FIFTH PRODUCTION by the American Negro Theatre group over a five year span, put on in a Harlem cellar, deals with a young prostitute who tries to abandon the life of sin and settle down to married respectability. The shadow of her past pursues her and in the end again envelops her in its shade. The fifth production is accordingly hardly noteworthy for any great thematic originality. The assisted author, a former Chicago lawyer, writes, however, with intermittent force and, while a greasepaint heaviness deadens sections of the play, several portions have a measure of dramatic drive. And for all the familiarity of the subject matter it exercises a share of theatrical interest.

There is something about a Negro company that often peculiarly makes a play seem a little better than it actually is, at least to the generality of reviewers, who on occasion ooze an unaccustomed good will and sympathy. Expecting little — without warrant or logic — they permit them-

selves to expand over playwriting and acting which would make a relatively small impression upon them in the white theatre. It is another and more impulsive form of the good will and sympathy which found and finds demonstration when an eighty-year-old actress like the late Mrs. Whiffen appears on the stage; or when a blues singer like Jane Froman, injured in an airplane crash, is wheeled out in a chair to do her numbers; or when the late Sarah Bernhardt appeared in her declining years with a wooden leg; or when in the final days of her career it was rumored that Duse was suffering from tuberculosis. Or even when the late Lowell Sherman once cleverly showed up with a heavy bandage wound about a perfectly intact head. It matters little whether the performances are critically worthy or not; the reviewing hearts give out.

The Negroes under immediate discussion are far, very far, from being unworthy, but they are, save in the cases of Hilda Simms and Frederick O'Neal, hardly less far from being quite the extraordinary blooms which in some overly impressible quarters they have been made out to be.

The exhibit was brought downtown into the Mansfield Theatre, on August 30, by John Wildberg for a run that lasted beyond the season. A few changes were made in the cast, notably Canada Lee in the small role of Danny, and several changes in the script, notably a greater emphasis upon humor and the tacking on of a ridiculously bogus happy ending.

LOVE ON LEAVE. JUNE 20, 1944

A comedy by A. B. Shiffrin, originally called Spare The Rod. Produced by Charles Stewart and Martin Goodman for 7 performances in the Hudson Theatre.

PROGRAM

SAM WILSON	Millard Mitchell	HOAGY	Bert Freed
MARY	Mary Sargent	NICK HARDY	John Conway
PAULA	June Wilson	SLIM	Ramsay Williams
LUCY	Rosemary Rice	DR. GRAHAM	Ross Matthew
LARRY DRAPER	James Dobson	MRS. LEWIS	Eleanor Gordon
ROBERT LEWIS	Stanley Bell	A POLICEMAN	Roderick Maybee
FLO	Joann Dolan	SERGEANT	John Farrell

A Group of Teen-Age Girls and Boys.

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The studio-living-room of the Wilsons.* Scene 2. *Approach to the Times Square subway station.* Scene 3. *Same as Scene 1.* Act II. Scene 1. *A room in Hotel Esquire.* Scene 2. *Same as Act I, Scene 1.* Act III. *Same as Act I, Scene 1.*

The entire action takes place within a few hours of a summer evening in 1944.

MR. SHIFFRIN, not content with the obviousness of the sailors on the loose among the girlfolk theme, has added for good measure a dose of the equally obvious juvenile delinquency theme and further has not neglected such even staler ingredients as alleged pregnancy on the part of a female youngster. His exhibit accordingly and duly brought the failures in the perspiration period of the previous ten seasons and this one to the handsome total of forty-eight.

Mr. Shiffrin's general observation is of a piece with his noted originality. He is apparently convinced, for instance, that when anyone has a first article accepted by the *Saturday Evening Post* he is instantly besieged by fancy offers from lecture bureaus, book publishers, and the radio. He also seemingly believes that national fame promptly follows the publication of any such article, and that if the *Reader's Digest* reprints it tremendous wealth lies just

around the corner. He thinks that a violation of the Sullivan law gets precisely the same police treatment as an unleashed dog and that the Times Square subway station was built by Thompson and Dundy. And he appears to have the notion that a hack writer may handily support a wife and two daughters, one of them full-grown, on an occasional little essay that brings three cents a word.

His humor and dramaturgical invention are not less piquant. "That awful word!" horrifiedly exclaims the wife when her husband uses a mild damn. "Oh!" surprisedly ejaculates the young daughter who enters the room and after several minutes observes her father loudly pounding at a typewriter a few feet away, "I didn't see you!" The father looks up and inquires what the daughter is reciting. "I am going to play in *Lady Windowmere's Fan*," the latter proudly tells him. "I'd rather you played in a band," he wittily retorts. Not allowing the audience to recover from its rib-cracking mirth, the daughter then asks her mother, "Was Oscar Wilde a fairy?", to which the mother answers modestly, "Well, he was a homosensual." The father shudders over his daughter's question. "She's your daughter!" he proclaims to his wife. "She's yours too!" excruciatingly comes back the latter.

HATS OFF TO ICE. JUNE 22, 1944

A musical "icetrvaganza," with songs by James Littlefield and John Fortis. Produced by Sonja Henie and Arthur M. Wirtz for a beyond the season run in the Center Theatre.

PRINCIPALS

Carol Lynne, Freddie Trenkler, the Caley Sisters, the Brandt Sisters, Helen Carter, the Four Sailors, Lucille Page, Geoffrey Stevens, Elouise Christine, James Caesar, Rudy Richards, Pat Marshall, and Don Rogers.

THE NATION-WIDE SUCCESS of the ice-skating shows, now running big into their seventh year, is undoubtedly due to the American admiration of monotony. The average American will, of course, indignantly deny any such thing, but the facts nevertheless seem to indicate its general plausibility. In the field of entertainment, for example, he not only relishes the inherent monotony of these ice-skating, to say nothing of roller-skating, exhibits but over the long years that of countless pairs of so-called ballroom dancers who perform almost exactly the same routines, acrobats who haven't varied their doings since the days of Tony Pastor, and trick dog acts that are as alike as so many sister singing acts, Indian club jugglers, tap dancers, and trained seals, in all of which he similarly since childhood has delighted.

There is little, furthermore, that fetches our average fellow-citizen more fully than blues singers, nine-tenths of them completely indistinguishable from one another; or radio quiz programs, which with minor exception vary as little as Hollywood horror movies, which he steadily attends with gusto; or the literature of Lloyd C. Douglas, which for some years now he has constituted among the best of the best-sellers. Willie Howard, who has been doing the same thing for almost twenty-five years, is close to his fancy, and until Charlie Chaplin gave up his art for love our fellow-countryman couldn't get enough of him, though

Charlie purveyed much the identical antics throughout his career.

It is needless to extend the catalogue; the few illustrations suffice to suggest the panorama's sweep. And the same worship of monotony obtains in other directions. The Italian restaurant table d'hôte business has luxuriated for more than half a century and, if anyone has ever discovered one such table d'hôte that has differed to a single damp anchovy from all the rest, he is cousin to Amerigo Vespucci. Yet our brother hasn't stopped gourmandizing them, just as he hasn't changed the color of his suits, which are invariably blue or gray or brown; or the nonsensical habit of carrying his handkerchief in the difficultly accessible upper left, instead of right, pocket; or the place in which he spends his annual vacations.

It is thus that some such ice-skating show as this *Hats Off To Ice*, the latest in the series, was pretty certain once again to appeal to him. It offered him the same old two and one-half hour monotonous entertainment and he accordingly had the night of his life at it. For two and one-half satisfying hours he could richly pleasure himself with the skaters executing the familiar twirls and whirls and racing for dear life hell-bent for nowhere. For two and one-half hours he could enchant himself with the spectacle of skating comedians landing on their netherparts, and ballet numbers which, save for a mere change of their titles, were fundamentally like the ballet numbers in the previous shows, and all the rest of the items that he had seen time and again.

For those of his fellow-countrymen who get a little fed up on scaloppini Marsala and trained seals, the show, however, may be allowed to have lacked an alleviating variety. Watching the clown Trenkler skating furiously toward a bench as if to sit down upon it and then whimsically bypassing it, no longer, after watching the same thing over a period of years, constituted the food of stintless humor. Surveying a series of ballets called "Isle Of The Midnight Rainbow," "Persian Legend," "Slavic Rhapsody," etc., which in view of the identity of the skating maneuvers

might just as well, save for the costumes, have been called by the same name, and that borrowed from the ice ballets of the previous shows, hardly constituted in turn an overly refreshing visual holiday. And the remaining acts, such as skaters jumping over obstacles, skating contortionists, knock-about comedy skaters in sailor suits, the female skater with bow and arrow clad as Diana and performing as "Goddess Of The Hunt," boogie-woogie skaters, and Russian kick-out and half-sit skaters, though all perfectly competent as of yore, only induced the feeling that Ouspensky's theory of spiral time was something of an established theatrical fact and that one was viewing the same ice show back in the year 1940.

TEN LITTLE INDIANS. JUNE 27, 1944

A murder mystery play by Agatha Christie. Produced for a beyond the season run by the Shuberts and Albert de Courville in, initially, the Broadhurst Theatre.

PROGRAM

ROGERS	Neil Fitzgerald	WILLIAM BLORE	J. Pat O'Malley
MRS. ROGERS	Georgia Harvey	GENERAL MACKENZIE	Nicholas Joy
FRED NARRACOTT	Patrick O'Connor	EMILY BRENT	Estelle Winwood
VERA CLAYTHORNE	Claudia Morgan	SIR LAWRENCE WARGRAVE	Halliwell Hobbes
PHILIP LOMBARD	Michael Whalen	DR. ARMSTRONG	Harry Worth
ANTHONY MARSTON	Anthony Kemble Cooper		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A summer evening in August. Act II. Scene 1. The following morning. Scene 2. The same day — afternoon. Act III. Scene 1. The same day — evening. Scene 2. The following afternoon.

The scene of the play is in the living-room of a house on Indian Island, off the coast of Devon, England.

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HIS IS ANOTHER in the line of mystery plays in which an assortment of persons gathered in quarters from which they cannot escape receive warning that they are about to meet their deaths and in which the successive demises drive the temporary survivors, and theoretically the audience, crazy with suspense. The theatre never rests very long without a refurbishing of the plot. It was already fully familiar all of fifteen years ago when Owen Davis again figged it out in *The Ninth Guest*, and since then various paraphrases have popped up at intervals to keep us from becoming unduly famished.

The exhibits are usually confined to one of two localities. They are laid either in the living-room of a town residence or mountain retreat or in the living-room of a house on a remote and rugged little island, with the sea running threateningly high. Miss Christie's is laid in the

living-room of a house on a remote and rugged little island, with the sea running threateningly high.

Miss Christie is also not too original in other directions. Who their mysterious host is, her characters are at a loss to know. Her butler comports himself with such touching innocence that the early betting, she hopes, will be twenty to one that he is the murderer, though obviously, as usual, he is not. One by one, as in *A Study In Scarlet*, diminishing numbers, in this instance ten small Indian figures, count off doom. And divers other such long favored devices are not missing, as might be anticipated from a confector of popular mystery tales invariably given to such stereotypes as "With a devastating ear-splitting blast on the horn an enormous Super Sports Dalmain car rushed past him at eighty miles an hour. Dr. Armstrong nearly went into the hedge. One of these young fools who tore around the country. He hated them. That had been a near shave, too. Damned young fool!"

A literata who is fond of descriptions like "an arrogant, almost cruel mouth," "the thick lips of Mr. Isaac Morris," and "his six feet of well-proportioned body, his crisp hair, tanned face, and intensely blue eyes" is furthermore hardly likely to emerge suddenly as an expert hand at dramatic character delineation. Nor is one given to such stuff as "Queer business when you came to think of it — the whole thing was queer — very queer . . . , " "But he felt uneasy; damned odd sort of place," and "I'm all right now; it just — gave me a turn" likely to emerge any more quickly as more than a mediocre writer of mystery drama. Miss Christie is the literata in point.

The only way to inject renewed vitality into the time-worn plot which Miss Christie has selected for her play and which she has borrowed for the purpose from her novel, *The Nursery Rhyme Murders*, published a half dozen or so years ago, is to invent means for the successive murders that may interest by virtue of their refreshing cunning and novelty. But in this direction she also fails signally. She has been able to think up nothing newer than the poison dropped into a drinking glass, the overdose of sleeping

medicine, the push over a high cliff, and the like. And as a playwright of any critical merit she has, in addition and worse, not stopped to consider that the dramatic repetition implicit in the numerous successive deaths must be wearying when it is not waywardly comical, and that to avoid any such impression and result it is necessary to exercise considerable dramaturgic ingenuity, which is apparently beyond her.

The one and only trace of relative ingenuity which Miss Christie has indicated in her novel lies in the manner in which she has her culprit dispose of himself. And even that is not altogether unfamiliar to addicts to mystery fiction. Yet she is handicapped by not being able to employ it on her stage, and so loses theatrically the single touch of approximate invention.

What is more, she is not wholly honest and above-board. A close observer of her stage may readily detect at least three instances wherein she, unquestionably agreeing with her play's director, deliberately misleads her audience and cheats her last act solution by causing her murderer to conduct himself otherwise than she subsequently apprises us he conducted himself. To specify only one, he does not covertly drop the potassium cyanide into Marston's glass, as it is later explained he did. The best mystery plays, of which *The Bat* is an example, deceive their audiences with strict legitimacy. The poorer ones, of which Miss Christie's is an example, intermittently are guilty of bogus deception.

It is popularly supposed that mystery plays are as close to the fancy of theatregoers as mystery stories are to the generality of readers. The supposition, if the records count for anything, is seemingly without basis in fact. So-called psychological thrillers aside, of the fifty-nine straight out-and-out mystery plays produced in the Broadway theatre during the previous dozen years fifty-three were failures and only six were real successes. Furthermore, among the sixty-five plays that have achieved the longest runs in the theatre — again, the psychological thriller, *Angel Street*, not counting — only one, the before-mentioned *The Bat*, was a straight mystery play.

The particular, damaging critical weakness of the specimen under consideration is this: when one goes to a murder play one wants to see the murders in action, and Miss Christie in considerable part simply talks about them, and not very convincingly. Her murders are too often committed off-stage and merely announced to the audience. Except for the sight of young Marston clutching at his throat and tumbling over the furniture, the other corpses achieve their corpsedom either in the wings or apparently meet death, it seems, from sitting tranquilly too long in a chair. To observe a character like her General Mackenzie amble out to a terrace and deposit himself peacefully in a chair and then be informed some minutes later that he is dead from a knife thrust, when one plainly has seen not the slightest suspicion of any knife thrust, scarcely makes for exciting melodrama. General Mackenzie might every bit as well have been announced to have died from pernicious anemia.

The exhibit nevertheless was a box-office success, making the score seven hits out of sixty tries.

SCHOOL FOR BRIDES. AUGUST 1, 1944

A farce by Frank Gill, Jr., and George Carleton Brown. Produced, initially, in the Royale Theatre for a beyond the season run by Howard Lang.

PROGRAM

CHARLIE	John Sheehan	STEPHANIE	Lucia Carroll
STEPHEN GARRETT	Charles Gary	RONNIE	Joan Webster
JULIE	Yolande Donlan	SUZAN	Kay Lawrence
DIANE	Frances Charles	VICKI	Shirley Whitney
ALICE	Mary Best	FREDERICK M. HASTY	Roscoe Karns
JOANNE	Olivia Russell	DEAN BAXTER (CONSTANCE KING)	Bernadene Hayes
LESLIE	Elizabeth Worthington	MARY	Ann Turner
GRACE	Darby Moore		
JEFF CONNORS	Warren Ashe		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. Drawing-room of Stephen Garrett's summer home on Long Island Sound. Time. Morning. Scene 2. The same, seven weeks later. Time. Afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. Upstairs bedroom of Garrett's home. Next morning. Scene 2. The same—midnight. Act III. Same as Act I. Early next morning.

HAVING AS CO-PRODUCER made a sack of money on a revision of the old Charlton Andrews-Avery Hopwood farce, *Ladies' Night In A Turkish Bath*, retitled *Good-Night Ladies*, which had established a record run of one hundred weeks in Chicago, Mr. Lang bethought him that he might further enrich his bank balance with a farce considerably louder and much dirtier. *School For Brides* was the result. Following a rewarding engagement in Chicago, where apparently anything can happen, including great prosperity for an allotment of cheap smut called *Maid In The Ozarks*, Mr. Lang brought his article to Broadway and, though critically apprised of his error in terms usually reserved to defective sewers and Southern politics, managed to harvest a considerable share of the public's dollars, thereby proving that apparently anything can also happen in New York,

including equal prosperity for an allotment of cheap smut called *School For Brides*.

This *School For Brides* was disclosed to be a herring paraphrase of the idea in numerous plays like *School For Husband*s, *The Charm School*, *School For Princesses*, etc. For two hours and a quarter a stage full of females, successively unadorned with scant bathing suits, sweaters that gave free play to their mammary glands, transparent negligées and adhesive pajamas and supposedly being coached in the arts of amour, occupied themselves in sniffing an eligible millionaire, jumping into and out of beds, and seizing every opportunity to reply to anything addressed to them, however innocent, in double or more often single entendre.

Every twenty minutes or so, by way of momentary relief from the lavatory dialogue, the humor was permitted to take a more immaculate turn and resolved itself into such rich forms as a woman's remark, "I'm going to complain to Ickes," with the query, "What are Ickes?" But the dominating motif of the evening consisted in edging as closely as possible to the word "fornication" without articulating it. Embroidering the script in the way of wit were such further biological jocosities as "What a student body! What a body!", such choice epigrams as "A peccadillo is sex in low gear," and such bits of business as a young woman spreading wide her legs over the side of a chair and, upon being reprimanded by the dean of the school, tartly observing that none of the men she knew had ever complained about it.

The cameo, in short, enjoyed all the attributes of a garbage-can save only the latter's somewhat less overpowering stench.

CATHERINE WAS GREAT. AUGUST 2, 1944

A play by Mae West for Mae West. Produced, initially, in the Shubert Theatre for 191 performances by Michael Todd.

PROGRAM

(In the Prologue)

JIM	Hubert Long	ROY	Mischa Tonken
MIKE	Robert Strauss	CORPORAL JOE	Joel Ashley
GREG	Philip Huston		

(In the Play)

COUNT NIKOLAI MIROVICH	Coburn Goodwin	CATHERINE II	Mae West
CAPTAIN DRONSKY	Philip Cary Jones	PRINCE POTEMKIN	Joel Ashley
ENGLISH AMBASSADOR	Henry Vincent	VARVARA	Elinor Counts
AMBASSADOR CHOISEUL	Owen Coll	FLORIAN	Ray Bourbon
AMBASSADOR MURAD PASHA	Don de Leo	LIEUTENANT BUNIN	Gene Barry
CAPTAIN DANILOV	Don Gibson	MARSHAL SUVOROV	John Parrish
ALEXIS ORLOFF	Hubert Long	IVAN VI	Michael Bey
COUNT PANIN	Charles Gerrard	PUGACHEFF	Bernard Hoffman
CHIEF CHAMBERLAIN	John Stephen	INNKEEPER	Harry Bodin
GREGORY ORLOFF	Philip Huston	MAURICE	Leon Hamilton
		SEMYONEV	Victor Finney
		VANYA	Frank Baxter
		CHIMNEYSWEEP	
		Lester ("Red") Towne	
		CHECHKOFSKI	Dayton Lummis

SYNOPSIS: Prologue. A USO Recreation Room in the United States of America. Time. The present. Act I. Scene 1. a council chamber in the Winter Palace, St. Petersburg, Russia. Time. 1762. Scene 2. The royal suite of the Empress Catherine II. A half-hour later. Scene 3. The council chamber. A few months later. Act II. Scene 1. The royal suite. That night. Act II. Scene 1. An inn several miles outside St. Petersburg. Later that night. Scene 3. A court-martial room in the Winter Palace. The next morning. Scene 4. The royal suite. Night. Act III. Scene 1. The royal suite. The following morning. Scene 2. The fireplace in the room of Count Mirovich. Night. Scene 3. The royal suite. A few minutes later. Scene 4. The secret room of Ivan VI. A short time later. Scene 5. The council chamber. Later that night.

T

HE HISTORY OF the American stage includes a ripe number of performers who have achieved eminence through relatively the same means as have served champion pie eaters, flagpole sitters, and long distance spitters. This should not, however, be regarded as given to too much aspersions, since say what you will it also takes talent, of a sort, to negotiate several gross of pies, especially such as are inoculated with aniseed and cocoanut; to squat atop a wooden pole for a month, when everyone appreciates the discomfort of sitting on baseball bleachers for a mere hour without getting up to stretch; or to master the art of expectoration to the point where one can hit a spittoon or Prohibition candidate for Congress in the next lot.

The fact albeit remains that, talent aside, the players in question have acquired for themselves a species of enduring, if peculiar, fame which has been withheld from any number of their colleagues admittedly far more gifted and that they probably will be remembered, particularly in the barrooms and other such haunts of mankind *in nubibus*, long after their aforesaid colleagues are forgotten.

Even old-timers who today can not for the life of them remember such actresses as, say, Nellie McHenry, Kate McLaurin and Effie Germon, haven't the slightest difficulty in recalling, for example, the Cherry Sisters. And if either talent or beauty were the issue, the offspring of M. and Mme. Cherry, in comparison with even the actresses named would be something of a piece with not overly burnished battleaxes. But nonetheless, though they were so bad in every way that parents used to take their more delinquent children to see them by way of punishment, they are recollected with a wayward relish, to such a degree, indeed, that they have become one of the apparently deathless legends of our theatre.

There perhaps never was allowed at large a more caseous star Shakespearean actor than John McCullough, who flourished back in the days before most of us still living were born. Yet though his roar and rant were of such proportions

that, when he was in good form, audiences had to strap themselves into their seats lest they be knocked out of them and projected against the auditorium's walls and though at times the more refined taste made it incumbent upon the poor fellow to play behind a net, he is vividly remembered at this late day even by men and women otherwise so feeble that they can no longer climb into bed and have to sleep on the floor.

Anna Held, at a somewhat later period, was another curio. With negligible genius beyond the ability to make what in the lingo of her time were known as bedroom eyes and to wink seductively through a pair of ditties called "Won't You Come And Play Wiz Me" and "I Joost Can't Make My Eyes Behave," she contrived nevertheless to establish herself not only as a disease of considerable artistic bulk but as the meridian of Gallic sex appeal. And it wasn't long before the Archie Gunn chromos of her displaying her come-hither look and a timid segment of undraped fundamental swept the adoring countryside and she became the favorite pin-up girl of the Teddy Roosevelt era.

Then there was Henry E. Dixey, who rose to a celebrity that endures to this hour hardly on the strength of his acting, which was of the species presently encountered in the small sidestreet theatres with wooden benches, but rather solely on the score of a shapely figure. When that figure was first disclosed to the public in tights in a show called *Adonis*, Henry's niche was carved out for him, and for many years he occupied the place in the affections of the ladies and their serving maids that was later to be occupied on the part of the latter alone by Chauncey Olcott and Andrew Mack. And the memory of Henry as a matinée idol *par excellence* persists, even in the case of countless persons who never saw him. -

It similarly takes a theatre-lover stricken with amnesia not to recognize the name of Rose Melville, who in her time enchanted the nation in the role of Sis Hopkins. She was one of the biggest sensations of her period, though her acting ability consisted for the most part in wearing pig-tails, standing with her feet wide apart, and pulling fur-

ously at a white stocking that was ever on the point of falling down, always with her mouth idiotically open. Just what it was that constituted Rose such a furore isn't easy for the historian to deduce, unless it was the open-and-shut hokum nature of the Sis Hopkins character. But even that seemingly obvious explanation doesn't entirely hold water, since her personal pull was so great that theatregoers flocked to see her dozens of times, collected her photographs (and she was not overly blessed with looks) as they later collected those of the stage's prime beauties, and rushed to read everything printed about her, especially in the road towns.

Cléo de Mérode and the girls known as Polaire and Corinne are further testimonials to our thesis. None had the slightest endowment, although Corinne could occasionally sing a song on key and, if provided with enough frou-frou petticoats, could give the effect of dancing, yet all made an impression which is still imbedded in recollection. Both Cléo and Polaire were purely the offspring of shrewd press-agentry. The former was a fairly good-looking woman with deep, dark eyes who wore her hair plastered down over her ears and who was elevated into the public's thirst through a cagy dissemination of the fable that she wore it that way because both her ears had been cut off by a jealous lover, of whom the tale went on to say that she had at least fifty.

Polaire, on the other hand, while she shared the Mlle. Mérode's deficiency in any discernible theatre gifts, hardly shared in her hypothetical abundance of frenzied anatomical admirers, but was contrariwise promoted into the public's rapt interest through the communiqué that she was the homeliest woman in the world, albeit one possessed of the smallest waist. The communiqué, while faulty on both counts, was swallowed whole by the proletariat, who in the oblique idiosyncrasy native to it substituted a paradoxical admiration for what more naturally might have been expected to be a ribald unconcern. Polaire was in reality not any homelier than two dozen women on the stage at the time; as a matter of fact, she was perceptibly better-looking than a number of such actresses as, say, Lorena Atwood,

Sadie Harris, Belle Blanche, May Vokes, and Ida Hawley. And while her waist was factually very small, it was no smaller than those of several other stage girls of the era, if we are to trust such able research students of her day as the late Jim Huneker, Charles Frederic Nirdlinger, and Larry Elkins.

As for Corinne, whose full name, restricted to family use, was Corinne Belle De Briou, she enjoyed, for all her limitations, the hearty favor of the public for many years, winning its enthusiastic applause in everything from operetta to musical comedy and revue. She had no beauty to sell; she had nothing of what is known as sex attraction; and her stage qualifications were minute. Yet she, too, has left her slipper prints in the sands of time.

There were many others. Long before, the celebrated Adah Isaacs Menken, a distinctly minor actress, became the rage and lasted as the rage for years for having appeared, in a melodrama called *Mazeppa*, in what at the time was regarded as scant clothing but in what today would be looked upon, in the phrase of a lesser Franco-American scholar of my acquaintance, as the "whole *tout ensemble*." Books have been written about her. Maggie Mitchell, a likable but indifferent actress of the persistent ingénue type whose histrionic virtuosity consisted largely in comporting herself as if she had just got up from sitting on an electric fan, became a public pet of such proportions that the stage-doors of the theatres in which she appeared took on the aspect of the Homestead riots. And Charlotte Crabtree, famous to the theatre as Lotta, with a talent not materially much more handsome, remains to this day and hour a symbol of her own period's pride and joy.

Sadie Martinot, who was not a French importation as most persons believed and still believe but who was born in New York in the second year of the Civil War, Mrs. James Brown Potter (Cora Urquhart) and Mrs. Leslie Carter were three other ewes who achieved high recognition for reasons that baffle critical inquiry. Sadie, who appeared on both the musical and the dramatic stages, was at one time the toast of the town, though she was assuredly

no glamour girl, had a figure that the late William Winter could look at with no danger to his puritanical conscience and libido, and purveyed a species of singing and acting that may generously be described as so-so. Mrs. Potter, the description of whose acting calls for an even greater generosity mixed perhaps with the politesse of a head-waiter, was, however, something of a beauty, had a wardrobe of uncommon elegance, and was married to the scion of a socially prominent and wealthy metropolitan family. These latter attributes in combination lifted her high into the American audience esteem and even into some critical regard both here and in England, and for years the pictures of her, her long autumnal hair tumbled down over her shoulders and her eyes as full of soulfulness as a hungry Sealyham's, adorned the temples of dramatic art at home and abroad, next to those of Duse and Bernhardt. She is another who remains a legend.

Mrs. Carter, whose acting probably needs no description since it has been experienced by many who compose the present day audience, was an amateur propelled into the public consciousness through the combined agency of a sensational divorce case and that canny showman, David Belasco. By means of such hocus-pocus as made even Hermann the Great blush, Belasco contrived not only to put the lady over on the public but to have her accepted as an artiste of such virtuosity as had seldom been excelled within the memory of the oldest Greek. And to this moment there are many who still accept his coggery at its face value.

What all this leads up to is, as you have anticipated, the later-day phenomenon, Miss Mae West, the Valeska Suratt of the Walter Lippmann era. Valeska, you will recall, since she bloomed not so very long ago as the cock crows, was one who got where she did by following the principle that masculine nitwits will inevitably mistake affectedly half-closed eyes, provided only they be accompanied by the wriggle of a hip encased in a tightly fitting gown, for overwhelming sex appeal, and their chauffeuse for a delightfully naughty baby. Mae has followed Valeska right down

the alley. She has, in point of fact, whether in the theatre or the moving pictures, followed Valeska down the alley ever since she showed up on the New York stage in the April of 1926 in a stint also of her own authorship called *Sex*, which was something.

Mae's acting technique is patterned after that of the chatelaine of an old-time *maison de joie*, which is to say the presentation of alumna sex elaborately pretending, with a measure of aberrant self-conviction, to be still one of the girls. And, despite its long employment, it is almost as effective today as it was when first she executed it. Mae West, in short, has made a name for herself largely through combining the Anna Held ocular technique with the bustle undulations of Corinne, adding to them a drawling nasal speech that suggests an Elsie Janis imitation of Ethel Barrymore, and fitting them all into the aloof indifference of the aforesaid Suratt. And that name has become as familiar to the masses as the names of Sherlock Holmes, Charlie Chaplin, and Elsie the Cow.

The great lady has, however, now made what seems to be the mistake of her life and it may conceivably in the long run cost her her previous large favor with the public. Aspiring to higher things, she has sought to establish herself as a more or less serious actress and has been rewarded with sighs of deep concern on the part of many in her erstwhile devout congregation. Her *Catherine Was Great* amounts to nothing more than a dirty-minded little school-girl's essay on the celebrated Russian empress, and her performance of the stellar role to little more than the kind of thing that used to be merchantanted by third-rate road actresses in such overstuffed junk as *In The Palace Of The King*, *The Helmet of Navarre*, *The Sword Of The King* and *Under The Red Robe*, plus only a lot of hip-tossings, anal oscillations, and assorted leers. Our Mae has done herself and us wrong. And that way, for all the temporary traces of recalcitrantly remaining interest, lies eventual forgetfulness, and the graveyard.

Like *School For Brides*, Mae's play sticks resolutely to a single sex joke and might accordingly have saved her pro-

ducer a lot of money had he skipped the redundant expensive sets, costumes and large cast and simply played it on a phonograph record. After Mae has rolled her hips for the two-hundredth time and nasally droned her glandular intentions in respect to most of the males in the troupe, even the staunchest West disciple feels faintly surfeited and would settle, with loud cheers, for Cornelia Otis Skinner in Bible readings.

Miss West is an all-right girl on her own account and her leers and drawls can still be amusing, but on this occasion she provided nothing to serve them. Her script amounts only to a painfully dull and wearisome French bedroom farce periodically interrupted by even duller and more wearisome excerpts from the history books, all already long familiar even to her Hollywood neighbors' school-children. And her attempts at humor, except in rare cases, are no better than confusing the Seven Deadly Sins with the Ten Commandments, allowing that the enemy guilty of murder, pillage and rape will be punished for the murder and pillage, and shovelling double entendre in freight loads in remarks about going to bed with Voltaire or Rabelais, making sure that the more backward customers will be spared undue embarrassment by carrying a book in her hand.

Miss Mae's entrances, of which there are ten or twelve, are further something to behold. Clad in a succession of gowns and head-dresses that might easily be mistaken for the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial lit up for a celebration of Benjamin Franklin's birthday, Miss Mae, to the accompaniment of a thunderous recording of Tschaikowski mixed with a little Harry Von Tilzer, emerges from time to time with such grandeur as hasn't been witnessed on the local stage since De Wolf Hopper knocked down half the cast and scenery of *Wang* by coming on atop an elephant.

Miss Mae is apparently the species of actress who deems it inexpedient and even slightly demeaning to make an entrance after the manner of some tramp like, say, Réjane or Bernhardt. Her epiphany must needs be heralded by a dozen court criers, must be preceded by a parade of guards with drawn sabres, must be orchestrated to a symphony of

ecstatic oh's and ah's, and must be followed, lest the stunning moment prove too evanescent, by a bespangled satin train so long that it consumes another two minutes for its own entrance. Or, if the scene be laid indoors, she must effect a grand entry by holding up the action for a space of time almost long enough to permit the playing of the second act of *Strange Interlude*, by then appearing in a statuesque pose behind slowly parted velour curtains and, after a properly extended pause wherein to suffer the breathless admiration of the audience, by moving imperiously down a flight of steps, like Sousa's brass band in *El Capitan*.

It is a pity. Mae has in her the stuff for a gay evening. But, so far as Catherine of Russia is concerned, East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet.

GOOD MORNING, CORPORAL
AUGUST 8, 1944

*A comedy by Milton Herbert Gropper and Joseph Shalleck.
Produced by William B. Friedlander for 13 performances
in the Playhouse.*

P R O G R A M

CORPORAL ROURKE	Joel Marston	A MAN	Donald Foster
DOTTIE CARSON	Charita Bauer	ALVIN STACEY	Lionel Wilson
HELEN MOORE	Frances Tannehill		
O'BANION BRODERICK	Russell Hardie		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Morning. Act II. That night. Act III. Immediately following.

The scene is Dottie Carson's apartment, New York City. Time. The present.

LIKE THE two antecedent offerings, this also fatigues itself with a single sex joke, in this case concerned with which one of three males will be the first to master the virginity of the heroine. The latter is a feather-brain who deems it her patriotic duty to marry men in the armed services in order that they may have something sentimentally to remember and fight for. Her resolve brings her a trio of husbands, since two who were thought to have been killed in action are found to be still alive. It also brings her what was hoped to be an hilarious comedy but what proves to be an importunate turkey.

The business opens with the antique situation of the young soldier and the heroine in bed, the former suffering from an acute hangover and, upon his dizzy awakening and surprised sight of his *vis-à-vis*, not aware that he has married her the night before. When finally he digests the news, he promptly and loudly claims his connubial rights, for twenty minutes. Presently the marine, whom the girl had married and thought dead, appears on the scene and in

turn loudly claims his connubial privileges, for forty minutes. Then the sailor, whom she had married and thought defunct, shows up and loudly repeats the demand, for fifty-five minutes. The few minutes that are left of the evening are consumed by all three voicing the demand simultaneously and eventually leaving the great privilege to the soldier. At intervals throughout, everyone undresses down to undershirts, underdrawers, silk slips, pajamas and night-gowns, and thereupon instantaneously dresses again. And the bed is worked overtime for hypothetical comedy purposes.

The humor, when momentarily it departs sexual intercourse, takes the following forms:

1. Heroine: "I'm Dotty." Soldier: "You sure are!"
2. Soldier: "In civilian life, I'm a pedalogist." Marine: "A pedwhatagist?" Soldier: "I am a foot doctor, and Dotty's my wife!" Marine: "Humph, you couldn't support an archl!"
3. Marine (*surveying a full-busted woman in a tight sweater*): "If a sheep only knew where it's gonna end up!"
4. Soldier: "Why didn't you go to sleep at the Y.M.C.A.?" Marine: "I don't play handball."
5. Soldier: "She makes sense if you don't listen to the words."
6. Soldier: "You give me a pain in the neck." Marine: "You give me a pain when I sit down."
7. Soldier: "I'm a pedalogist." Girl: "Well, why not? Religion is free in this country."
8. Marine: "I was in a prison camp." Girl: "But not long enough."

Samples of the less direct sexual intercourse humor:

1. Marine: "That baby maybe can't find her way around in the daytime but, oh boy, does she know her way around when the lights are turned out!"
2. Girl (*advising Marine*): "I wouldn't sleep with Dotty." Marine: "What's the use of two women sleeping with each other?"

Samples of the direct sexual intercourse humor:

1-100: Consult the works of John Cleland.

The presenting company was of a piece with the play. The leading lady contented herself in acting her role largely with her eyes and nose, popping the former wide open to register interest and half-closing them in turn to register disinterest, and alternately elevating and dejecting the latter to indicate, respectively, hauteur and humility. The soldier hero didn't bother to go to all that trouble and composed his art for the greater part of the evening in simply popping his eyes wide open to register everything, including what he apparently imagined was infectious charm. The actress in the role of the leading lady's girl-friend relied, on the contrary, upon a variety of techniques, the techniques being, seriatim, a toss of the rear to convey lofty indifference and a double toss of the rear to indicate lofty contempt. And the actor who played the hardboiled Marine confined his role, save for the occasional making of a fist, to the back of his throat.

Warm weather failure No. 49.

SONG OF NORWAY. AUGUST 21, 1944

An operetta, book by Milton Lazarus based upon a play by Homer Curran, music by Edvard Grieg adapted by Robert Wright and George Forrest, with lyrics by same. Produced for a far beyond the season run by Edwin Lester in the Imperial Theatre.

PROGRAM

SIGRID	Janet Hamer	Sharon Randall
EINAR	Kent Edwards	Karen Lund
ERIC	Robert Antoine	Gwen Jones
GUNNAR	William Carroll	Ann Andre
GRIMA	Patti Brady	Elizabeth Bockoven
HELGA	Jackie Lee	Sonia Orlova
RIKARD NORDRAAK	Robert Shafer	Dudley Clements
NINA HAGERUP	Helena Bliss	Frederic Franklin
EDWARD GRIEG	Lawrence Brooks	Robert Bernard
FATHER GRIEG	Walter Kingsford	Cameron Grant
FATHER NORDRAAK	Philip White	Alexandra Danilova
MOTHER GRIEG	Ivy Scott	Nora White
FREDDY	Frederic Franklin	Barbara Boudwin
COUNT PEPPI LE LOUP	Sig Arno	
LOUISA GIOVANNI	Irra Petina	
FRAU PROFESSOR NORDEN		
	Doreen Wilson	Sylvia Allen, Grace Carroll
		CHILDREN

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Troldhaugen* (Hill of the Trolls) — just outside the town of Bergen, Norway. Midsummer's Eve — in the 1860's. Scene 2. A square on the outskirts of Bergen. Act II. Scene 1. Copenhagen — reception room of the Royal Conservatory. One year later. Scene 2. Rome — Tito's chocolate shop. One year later. Scene 3. Rome — ballroom of Villa Pincio. Scene 4. Troldhaugen — interior of the Grieg home. Some time later. Scene 5. The Song of Norway.

THIS IS STILL ANOTHER in the line of theatrical presentations dealing with a noted composer and making use of his compositions. In this case the composer is Edvard Hagerup Grieg, whom Hans von Bülow dubbed the Norwegian Chopin.

Most of these exhibits follow a more or less familiar stage

pattern. In the beginning, we see the composer as a poor and struggling figure, his genius unrecognized save by a character actor who quaveringly admonishes, "Just you wait and see; just you wait and see!" and by the ingénue whose knowledge of music, if any, is scarcely indicated in her vocal interpretations of his melodies but who loves him, despite his whiskers.

Next, we engage him in a state of affluence and acclaim, his masterpiece finished and himself a lion, sought after by duchesses and barmaids alike. But he is not happy. What induces his misery commonly takes one of two forms. Either the lady of his heart, which is usually depicted as being inordinately timid, misunderstands his reserve and announces in a pique that she is to be the betrothed of some one else, or her parents, who opposed him in his days of poverty and neglect, alienate her from him by whispering to her that he has a mistress, the Baroness Ludmilla von Heishosen, who has been responsible for his pecuniary and social success. One or the other of these contretemps so disconcerts him that he either tears up his masterpiece or, if the librettist considers that going a bit too far in view of the historical record, vows he is done with composition forevermore.

In the final stanza, all is usually again set to rights and, to a fortissimo rendering by the entire company of whichever of the composer's melodies has been selected as the theme song, we behold him, now in talcumed hair or a gray wig, in contentful proximity to his lady love, with an emissary of the Emperor standing by with an invitation to spend the weekend at the palace.

In the movies, I am told, there have been a lot of two-reelers devoted similarly to lives of the great composers, interlarded in each case with those of their compositions that are familiar to the movie public from phonograph records. In that medium, I am further apprised, the business invariably follows much the same track, except that the composer never under any circumstances gets the inspiration for his masterpiece in surroundings other than an arbor constituted of obviously artificial flowers and never

performs it on a piano or violin save the latter and himself are illuminated by a shaft of moonlight streaming through the window.

While the music in both the stage and screen exhibits is naturally more than satisfactory, the books in both cases may be said to leave something to be desired. The basic stories, adhering in sufficient degree to biography, may here and there not be too painful. But the persistent conviction of the authors that the box-office willy-nilly demands a leaven of comedy generally leads to grim disaster. To attend, say, an operetta treating of the life and works of Franz Schubert and to hear his lovely "Heidenröslein" followed by some small-time vaudeville joke like "Marriage is an institution, but who wants to live in an institution?" is to induce the feeling in the judicious that the management has doubtless confused Schubert with Raymond Hubbell. Nor is there materially more comfort when one goes to a treatise on Johann Strauss, as one periodically has gone, and hears one of his beautiful waltzes interrupted by a pair of theoretical comedians exchanging banter on the altitude of Herbert Hoover's collars.

For one exhibit like Guitry's delicately charming *Mozart*, it seems to be our theatrical portion to get at least three or four which, except for the music, are in essence little more than old Harry B. Smith and Stanislaus Stange musical comedies, with only the latter's heroes given a maroon velvet house coat, wig, and accent. The plot procedure is generally identical: faith and hope, disillusion and despair, triumph and beatification. Substitute for the composer's music tunes by some Tin-Pan Alley illuminatus and one would not be able to differentiate between what is going on on the stage and what went on years ago when Helen Bertram left Ritchie Ling standing forlorn in the purple moonlight or vice versa, the while Gus Weinburg kicked Josie Sadler in the petticoat.

Though *Song Of Norway* does not depart signally from formula, its book enjoys at least one considerable virtue. Aside from a comedian's observation, upon grimacingly downing a cup of aquavit, that the toast should not be

"skol" but "scald," there is a gratifying absence of the two-a-day jocosities which invariably go a long way toward wrecking such operettas. This alone is enough to recommend the evening to previous customers of exhibits of a piece who have been driven to bite their neighbors upon hearing something like "Roses From The Southland" accompanied by such facetiae as "I am starved for love" — "Well, then, you'll have to go hungry for some time, kid."

Point No. 2 in the evening's favor is a company that not only can sing but that contains several players new to the Broadway theatre blessed with highly attractive personalities. In Helena Bliss, absurdly condemned in a couple of earlier shows to almost invisible roles and, in addition, to stand behind a potted palm where the audience couldn't see her without falling half-way out of its seats, the local operetta stage has acquired one of its most engaging young women and one who, to boot, both in the matter of voice and acting comportment is a delight and satisfaction. Irra Petina, formerly a member of the Metropolitan opera company, supplements her vocal talents with a surprising comedy equipment and maneuvers a role which in other hands might be torpid into a genuinely droll creation. As Grieg, Lawrence Brooks, an erstwhile night club singer, succeeds nicely in avoiding the suggestion of prosciutto usually encountered in the delineation of composer roles, and Sig Arno, a Hitler refugee, proves himself a welcome comic in the grand old bogus-elegance manner of Nineties.

The weakness of the exhibit, aside from the dialogue, lies in the dance and ballet department. George Balanchine, who in the past has sometimes acquitted himself rather handsomely, has been able to provide the present occasion with little more than stereotyped peasant dances, an obvious waltz ballet and, worse, a symbolic ballet concluding the evening that for supreme silliness has not been matched in some years. If the management had been wise, it would have eliminated that final choreographic nonsense, since not only does it unduly prolong the evening but minimizes the agreeable impression of what has preceded it. Had it let Grieg play his paean to Norway and let off-

stage voices gradually take it up, the operetta would have achieved its right and proper curtain.

The Grieg compositions from which the songs have been derived include, among others, the A-minor concerto, waltz Op. 12, No. 2, the violin sonata No. 2 in G major, the nocturne and "Wedding in Troldhaugen," " 'Twas a Lovely Eve in June," "To Spring," "Water Lily," "The Brook" of the Haugtusse cycle, "Albumblatt," "Poème Erotique," "Springtide," "Waltz Caprice," "Ich Liebe Dich," "Woodland Wanderings" and "Peer Gynt."

 LOWER NORTH. AUGUST 25, 1944

A comedy-drama, so-termed, by Martin Bidwell. Produced by Max J. Jelin for 11 performances in the Belasco Theatre.

PROGRAM

HANK	Jerry Rand	JOHNNY	John Farrell
PETERSON	Frank Bradley	MARINE (DRESS BLUES)	Royal Rompel
SOBIESCHYK	David Graham	ANDY	Don Grusso
COCHRAN	Dort Clark	FRANK	Phil Pine
HEATH	Douglas Jones	RUBY	Blanche Faye
JOHNSON	Dean King	PEARL	Blanche Gladstone
CURLEY	Arthur Hunnicutt	BURKS	Paul Ford
BRUCE	Robert Brenton	THE MARINE SERGEANT	John Conway
KARNES	Eddie Waglin	MR. HINES (TRAVELLING SALESMAN)	Watson White
SPADONI	Robert Myers	PHYLLIS	Cora Smith
JIM	Kim Spalding	DOROTHY	Flora Knight
PRATZELL	Rusty Lane	MESSENDER	Mitchell Ahrons
PHILLIPS	Bob Lackaye		
BARTON	Charles Clancy		
MARY	Sara Anderson		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Upper deck of Group I. School building in a naval training station. Saturday morning. Act II. The Rendezvous Bar. That evening. Act III. The next morning — Sunday — in the cubicle called Lower North.

THE PLAY DERIVES its title from that quarter of a ship in which the sailors bunk. As drama, the play itself derives from the verb. The author, a Hollywood scenario writer, is reported to have gained his material at first hand but, in gaining it, he seems to have snooped around with a box of Max Factor movie makeup in his hand and a locket containing a photograph of Samuel Goldwyn around his neck. Purporting to depict the life of gobs at a naval training station, his exhibit resolves itself into a dramaless succession of episodes overblown with declamation which probably need only a few moving picture lot pretty boys and several so-called starlets with shapely figures to convert them into a Roxy stampede. Employing assorted types of young men

from various sections of the United States and indicating their reactions to the new and strange existence into which the war emergency has thrust them, he is able to develop nothing from his characters but the old theatrical business of bringing them ultimately, after the usual doubts, bewilderments and disaffections, to the conclusion that "there are things in this world more important than we are and that must be fought for so that the future may be made safe for all the little people and that right may again prevail over wrong."

The embellishments include the stereotyped monologue by a marine returned from Guadalcanal, accompanied by the stereotyped recollection of its terrors, the conventional dormitory antics, the usual roadside saloon jive, the rubber-stamp business of magnanimously covering up one of the boys who has been away without leave, the sensitive lad whose brother is at the fighting front, the lanky youth from the corn-belt who drawls his philosophies about war, the officer who hides a tender heart under his gruff exterior, and, among other such stock characters and stock appurtenances, of course the never-omitted floozies. And collaterally, of course, the usual blanket talk about women and sex.

The author shares fundamentally in this last respect much of the juvenility of the majority of playwrights who concoct plays about sailors and men of the sea generally. Almost to a nose they adhere to the credo that sailors as a class are as overpowered by their sexual instincts as *Lepus cuniculus*, whereas foot soldiers, the cavalry, artillery, the air forces and all other branches of the armed services are relatively as chill and moral as an equal number of polar bears. Like the notion that all Frenchmen are such lovers that the female population of France hasn't had a good night's sleep since most of them went away on the first Crusade under Godfrey of Bouillon, the idea that American sailors in the mass are even more copiously glandular pops up in the theatre almost every time an actor comes on in pants that flare at the bottom.

That there are sailors given to miscellaneous sexual ac-

tivity is unquestionably something of a fact, just as there are bookkeepers, cab drivers, and Senators. But that every last single sailor the moment he hits land, even the Congo, can not restrain his libido and comports himself like a combination Petronius, Cellini and Hollywood movie director is a little hard to believe. The basis of the hypothesis is a bit shaky as well, involving as it does the invigorating nature of the salt air which the sailor constantly breathes, his long periods of forced abstinence, the plain and hearty food he eats at sea, the stimulating regular hours, the enforced exercise, etc. Analysis finds most of such theoretical reasons for the tar's virility open to some skepticism.

The larger portion of the life of a sailor at sea isn't exactly like lounging in the breeze-swept palm court of the old *Berengaria*. For the small time he spends on the open deck there are many hours when he is somewhere down in the ship's innards, where the air isn't perceptibly more invigorating than in a Hoboken ginmill. Far from acquiring sexual desire, he instead finds it diminished by the exhausting routine of physical activities. The food which he eats aboard ship, while substantial, is not of the kind that contributes to anatomical incalescence and, in such cases as it is feared it may, is customarily dosed up with a depressant in the form of saltpeter. He often sleeps in a small hammock or hard cubicle which has a tendency to make an anchorite for days afterward of almost any man, even a movie actor. Long abstinence, in its paradoxical fashion, tends sometimes to minimize his sexual urge. And so on. The idea, incidentally, that long abstinence in itself is conducive to such amorous activity as would shame the heroes of all the plays that Tristan Bernard ever wrote would, if true, make any sailor look like an amateur in comparison with any Arctic explorer, jailbird, or smallpox victim. If the general conception of sailors is true, moreover, every highly respected admiral has a lot retroactively to answer for to his pastor, which is, of course, unthinkable.

Warm weather failure No. 50.

SLEEP NO MORE. AUGUST 31, 1944

A farce by Lee Loeb and Arthur Strawn. Produced by Clyde Elliott for 7 performances in the Cort Theatre.

PROGRAM

GEORGE SLATER

Raymond Bramley

SMITHERS

John "Skins" Miller

HARRY FOSTER

John Kane

DIANA CLARK

Patricia Ryan

MILLIE JENKINS

Louise Larabee

H. CLIFFORD GATES

Robert Armstrong

MR. RILEY

Len Hollister

WILLIAM JENNINGS BROWN

George Offerman, Jr.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT KRUMP

G. Swayne Gordon

MRS. RIDGEWAY

Doris Underwood

OSCAR RIDGEWAY

Gerard Martin

MR. McCLELLAN

Horace Cooper

JOHN B. TIMMONS

Ed Latimer

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *George's barber shop. Morning.* Act II. *The "new" offices of H. Clifford Gates and Associates. Several days later.* Act III. *Same as Act II. Next morning.*

A

THROWBACK TO the period of George M. Cohan's *Get-Rich-Quick-Wallingford*, Roi Cooper Megrue's *It Pays To Advertise* and their various imitations and paraphrases, the farce indulges in much the same plot shenanigan and much all the old other stuff. The present writers, however, haven't an iota of the skill of the earlier playwrights, nor an iota of their ingenuity and humor. Their effort, accordingly, is an arthritic zombie.

The plot deals again with the slicker who tries to capitalize on phony inventions, among them a mechanical hair restorer, a contrivance for persuading hens to lay more eggs, and a laundry machine that operates without soap and water. Just as things look black for him he comes upon a young man who has experimented with a pill that precludes the necessity for sleep. Seizing upon the idea, the slicker runs up orders to the tune of 3,000,000 dollars only to be stymied at the height of his success by the pill's discoverer himself falling a victim to Morpheus. The rest of the evening is occupied by his frantic efforts to get himself out of

a hole. Although he extricates himself, he fails to extricate the play.

The first curtain isn't up one minute before an allusion to toilet paper and another to Yom Kippur firmly establish the witty virtuosity of the authors. The rest of the evening doesn't disappoint. A character dashing excitedly about the stage steps into a wire wastebasket, gets his foot caught in it, and can't get it out. Everybody rushes to hand a prospective customer a cigar and, when he puts one in his mouth, solicitously crowds around to light it for him. When a character whose wife has left him appears to be worried, another asks him if he fears she will not come back, whereat he replies that he is afraid she will. The mechanical contrivance for growing hair is adjusted to a customer's head and explodes. The male characters allude to the females as canaries, and dollars are called clams. And whenever a deal seems about to be closed, the three partners rush at one another and frantically shake hands. The only restraint indicated during these last or any other moments of the turbulent evening, and the only trace of originality, is in the authors' abstinence from the usually concomitant ejaculation, "Oh, boy!"

Final warm weather failure No. 51.

LAST STOP. SEPTEMBER 5, 1944

A play by Irving Kaye Davis. Produced by Victor Hugo-Vidal for 23 forced performances in the Ethel Barrymore Theatre.

PROGRAM

MRS. SHEPPARD	Frederica Goring	WALTER	Seth Arnold
MRS. CHUBB	Enid Markey	CATHERINE CHANDLER	Catharine Doucet
REV. MR. CUMMINGS	William Hughes	MR. COOK	Gregory Robins
MRS. MANNING	Mary Gildea	MRS. ANNA HAINES	Minnie Dupree
MRS. HOLLISTER	Nell Harrison	HOWARD HAINES	Raymond Bailey
MRS. MILLER	Daisy Belmore	ISABEL HAINES	Mavis Freeman
MRS. SMITH	Laurie McVicker	MARY STEVENS	Effi Afton
MRS. DINGMAN	Mary Perry	MR. WHITE	Robert Stewart
MRS. FITZPATRICK	Grace Valentine	STATE TROOPER	Clark Poth
MRS. BALDWIN	Augusta French	REPORTER	Alan Brock
MRS. MABLEDOOR	Eda Heineman		

SYNOPSIS: The action takes place in the parlor of an Old Ladies Home. Act I. Scene 1. One Saturday noon. Early October. Scene 2. Later that afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. Evening. The next day. (Sunday.) Scene 2. The next day, about five o'clock in the afternoon.

THAT THE WORST was to be feared on this occasion was clear to anyone familiar with Mr. Davis' antecedent bequests to the theatre. There are playwrights like that. It is, of course, not mannerly for a reviewer to stamp them in advance of each actual production, but there is nothing in the critical by-laws to prevent him from smelling them from afar, and smelling them from afar is the easiest thing he does. He knows — and long experience has proved him right — that any playwright who has indicated no slightest merit in the past and whose output has invariably consisted of zeros is not very likely to metamorphose himself suddenly into something of a dramatic genius, or even a moderately succulent fellow. There may be times when he miraculously turns out a play that is not quite so entirely

bad as his previous plays, but not within the memory of the oldest theatregoer has he turned out one which has been much better than that and which has made his critics eat their earlier distasteful words.

Last Stop accordingly disappointed no one. It was just as dowdy as clairvoyant instinct had predicted. The idea of a home for aged females might possibly be developed by an adept playwright into a combination of sentiment and humor that would make for some theatrical entertainment. But Mr. Davis' conception of sentiment seemingly does not go much beyond having an inmate of such an institution elaborately fondle a doll and indulge in moist elocution about the aching need of motherly arms. And his humor resolves itself largely into such things as a faded inmate's insistence that when she was young she was a pretty saucy package so far as the men were concerned.

Mr. Davis, in short, has no imagination, no invention, and writes like one of the lesser contributors to the pulp magazines. One of his old, frayed women is thus presented as the coy, fluttery type who seeks laughter through her use of a perfume called "Lovely Forever." Another follows suit with an intimate allusion to Gypsy Rose Lee. Still another is made the low-comedy Irish type and goes in for remarks about toilet rooms. Another still is the typical deaf character who garbles the names of persons to whom she is introduced. And so on.

The dialogue is equally fertile. A male visitor to the home allows that he has seven children and observes that since seven is a lucky number he has decided to have no more, whereupon one of the old ladies admonishes him that eleven is also a lucky number. A woman quavers that she is ninety-two years old and another whimsically confides to the others that the woman is ninety-five if she is a day. There is badinage over the dropping of cigarette butts into the lavatory bowl. An aged inmate says that her birthday is three days hence and is asked what she intends to do with the three days, whereas another interrupts that she would want the three days to change her mind. An aged actress character reading a large book is asked what it is, replies

that it is her press book, and is asked what she presses in it. It goes on as merrily as that.

The evening was further agonized by a double ear-strain. Not only did Catharine Doucet, upon whom fell the burden of outlining the plot, speak her lines so *pianissimo* that the audience had to guess what the plot was (which wasn't, however, too hard), but the air-cooling apparatus throughout the proceedings emitted a steady, loud whistling sound that drowned out even the guessing. Add to all this stage direction by Erwin Piscator which permitted the actors to dash madly hither and thither as if the old home were superintended by Sonja Henie; a son, daughter and daughter-in-law who could not afford to support an old mother yet who were allowed to dress in the height of fashion and to wear enough jewelry to stock Tiffany's window; and the poor old mother herself in a modish pink frock topped by a Lilly Daché flowered bonnet; and you get not only a picture of the whole but probably the jitters.

There is further reason to doubt whether an audience's reaction to a play about a lot of destitute women is materially assisted when it observes in the program that the paupers' shoes, stockings and hats are the creations of very *soigné* artisans.

Although, along with butlers and policemen, old women's roles are relatively easy to play and are generally certain of audience acceptance, the performances by the actresses on this occasion were mostly so poor that they provided an exception to the hokum rule.

THE DAY WILL COME. SEPTEMBER 7, 1944

A play by Leo Birinski. Produced by Harry Green with Harry Green in the leading role for 20 performances in the National Theatre.

PROGRAM

BARANOVA	D. J. Thompson	FRANZ	Richard Bolton
SHURA	James Dobson	GENERAL VON BRUCK	Arthur Vinton
ARTAMON	Bruce Halsey	CAPTAIN BIRKENBACH	Ronald Alexander
FYODOR SEMIONITCH	John Paul	SERGEANT	William Forrest
MARPHA	Jan Sherwood	GENERAL GENSLER	Stephen Roberts
PARASHA	Camila Ashland	GENERAL ZIEMSEN	Bernard Pate
NIKITA	John F. Hamilton	GENERAL VON HOFF	William Pringle
MOSHKO	Sterling Mace	ADOLF HITLER	Brandon Peters
KOLYA	Ronnie Jacoby		
ANUSHKA	Lenore Thomas		
AVRUM DOVID	Harry Green		
KARL	Frederick Coe		

SYNOPSIS: The action of the play takes place in a Russian Isba. Act I. Afternoon. Act II. Two days later. Act III. Four days later.

THIS IS STILL another paraphrase of the Wandering Jew theme by a playwright who in the years before the war contributed at times to the pleasure of the lighter Central European stage. In this serious essay he has not, however, contributed to the satisfaction of the American. Mixing realism with symbolism and fantasy, he has tried to picture a meeting between Adolf Hitler and a patriarchal Jew on the steppes of Russia during the march on Moscow and has succeeded only in doing very badly by a basic theme that has been handled with immeasurably more skill and persuasion by the authors of *Jacobowsky And The Colonel*.

The fundamental difficulty with the play, as with the majority of others of a kidney, is that, like a set piece of fireworks, one knows more or less exactly what will ensue even before the match is applied. The theme of Jews and their persecutors, especially when treated by the persecuted

themselves, is bound to follow the single, familiar track; the setup of the characters is inevitably obvious; and the philosophies expressed are fully those anticipated.

That sincerity and passionate conviction are the portion of the authors of such exhibits is plain. Yet sincerity and passionate conviction, though conventionally praised by the generality of reviewers as if they were *desiderata par excellence*, are frequently responsible for some very bad plays. An intense belief in a theme may conceivably help a playwright, but it may just as conceivably debilitate him, since it obscures those facets of vagrant imagination, critical selection, and humor which might greatly improve his work. Sincerity is as often the attribute of hacks as of geniuses. Passionate conviction is as frequently the mark of amateur intelligences as of great poets. Shaw's early sincerity and conviction produced only such an inferior play as *Widowers' Houses*; some of his finest plays, like *Caesar And Cleopatra*, were the result of subsequent tongue in cheek. Brieux's passionate assurance contrived such claptrap as *Damaged Goods*; when he left off indignation and smiled sardonically at himself he turned out something like *Les Hannetons*, one of the best and most intelligent comedies of our time. The same with Maugham. His one play doubtless profoundly felt by him, *For Services Rendered*, does not compare with the best of his light comedies, written, he once confided to his friends, simply to get the money to buy some good real estate properties in London. I have known Eugene O'Neill long and intimately. Of all the plays he has written, *Days Without End* is, I believe, closest to his inner self, and it is one of his very weakest. Sincerity and passionate conviction, in our American drama, have given birth chiefly to the stage stuffs of such second- and third-raters as Augustus Thomas, Charles Rann Kennedy, George Broadhurst, and Charles Klein. Birinski's share of the qualities has blinded him in the writing of drama of merit.

That *The Day Will Come* is high-minded may be allowed. That it is at the same time tedious to an equally high degree is the demonstrated fact. After less than an act of it the interest evaporates, and all that is left to the auditor is

the reflection that these refugee authors had far better revert to the kind of plays they wrote before the war and apply their indignation, righteous and wholly to be sympathized with, to the book rather than to the dramatic stage form.

As if conscious of his lack of humor in the face of his theme and as if appreciating from experience the necessity arbitrarily to incorporate a little on behalf of the box-office, Birinski has recourse to such infirmities as "There isn't a worse headache in the world than a wife who is a headache," which further enfeeble his already feeble play. And even further enfeebling it in production was a stage set supposedly representing the interior of a small Russian peasant cottage which more closely resembled the *Maisonette Russe* in the St. Regis Hotel; peasants in the grip of muddy war as spick and span as the chorus in Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Girl From Pskov*; makeup on Harry Green as the Wandering Jew that suggested Monty Wooley even further disguised as Santa Claus; a Hitler in the person of Brandon Peters who looked disconcertingly like Franklin P. Adams and acted like Willie Howard; and stage direction by Lee Elmore that treated the script simultaneously like Simonov's *The Russian People* and Jerome K. Jerome's *The Passing Of The Third Floor Back*, with faint overtones of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

DOWN TO MIAMI. SEPTEMBER 11, 1944

A comedy by Conrad Westervelt. Produced by Edgar Mac-Gregor for 8 performances in the Ambassador Theatre.

PROGRAM

TORRENCE APPLEGATE	Herbert Heyes	MRS. MANDEL	Dora Weissman
MRS. APPLEGATE	Merle Maddern	HARRY KATZ	John Gould
RUFUS APPLEGATE	Charles Lang	GLORIA MANDEL	Elaine Ellis
HELEN GUNSTON	Lyn Logan	LOIS	Robert Strauss
STELLA	Anna Franklin	WAITER	Zac Caully
MORRIS MANDEL	Robert Leonard	MICHAEL O'HARA	Brian O'Mara

SYNOPSIS: *The entire action of the play takes place in and around the Rooney Square Hotel in Miami Beach. Act I. The Terrace breakfast room, late morning. Act II. The lounging room of a private bathing suite, that afternoon. Act III. The Mandel suite, the following afternoon.*

HERE, BEYOND MUCH DOUBT, is the worst play shown on the New York stage in the last quarter-century, surpassing in complete hopelessness such past triumphant horrors as *Love's Call*, *The House Of Doom*, *Reprise*, and even, impossible as it seems, this very season's *A Strange Play*. A paraphrase of *The Cohens And The Kellys*, *Abie's Irish Rose* and other such conspiracies wherein the stroke of eleven p.m. proves to be an irresistible catalyzer of Jews and Gentiles who fifteen minutes earlier have not been able to stand the sight of each other, it achieves signal eminence by virtue of the fact that its author apparently knows nothing of playwriting and supplements his virtuosity in that direction with a total lack of originality, humor, taste, and acquaintance with the dramatic elements of the English language. He fashions his entire goose-egg around a single point, to wit, that a Gentile girl and a Jewish boy can not swim, whereas the Jewish boy's sister and the Gentile girl's brother can, thus making both couples inevitably preordained for the marriage altar. And he hits this single note

for the entire two and one-half hours without deviation of any kind, save possibly for a few moments when the Jewish father discourses on the high prices of food at Miami hotels and an extraneous Irish policeman sings "Mother Machree" for no other reason than that the producer seemingly discovered that the actor engaged for the role had once been in a musical comedy troupe.

The occasion was further enriched by stagehands who could not manage the setting up of the elaborate scenery and who conducted their grievances so volubly and audibly when the several curtains were down that the audience in turn found it impossible to conduct its own grievances on the odor of the play itself.

Speculation on how any such verjuice ever came to be produced was partly explained away by a newspaper interview by Edgar MacGregor, the impresario, several days before the opening. In it, Mr. MacGregor, who announced that the play "had cost 46,000 dollars in actual money and will show it," indicated, despite some experience in the theatre, that he knew less about plays than even about audiences and critics. *Down To Miami*, he emphatically affirmed, was an audience play not a critics' play and its appeal, which he trusted would be great, would be rather to the countless people who relished the formula species of drama. He then nevertheless promptly dispatched reviewing seats to all the critics, which under the circumstances appeared to be in the nature of a gratuitous invitation to smallpox.

The play, as noted, is an incontrovertibly bad play, yet where, notwithstanding, did Mr. MacGregor get the idea that the critics invariably dislike bad plays? He should get around more. Looking over the records, it seems that the critics, or at least an appreciable number of them, have liked a lot of bad plays which audiences, to whom Mr. MacGregor was much too condescending, would subsequently have nothing to do with. In evidence whereof, let Mr. MacGregor analyze *Variety's* annual critics' box scores.

Conversely, where did Mr. MacGregor get the further idea that critics and audiences do not often like exactly the

same kind of plays, irrespective of quality? Study the catalogue of plays that have achieved the longest runs in our later-day theatre and, from the years of *The Bat* down to *Life With Father*, it will be found that nine times out of ten the tastes of the critics and audiences have coincided. If, furthermore, it be argued that the long runs were simply a consequence of the critics' good notices and hence no exact proof of the identity of tastes, reflect that many plays in the same long period which received equally good, if not much better, notices achieved runs hardly visible to the eye.

Since Mr. MacGregor's offering, as observed, vaguely resembled *Abie's Irish Rose*, it is likely that he had that none-such in mind when he indulged in his interview. *Abie's Irish Rose*, true enough, was not what Mr. MacGregor elects to describe as a critics' play and, though most of the critics didn't like it, it still turned out to be an audience play of hefty proportions. But what does that prove? It proves nothing and only confuses the MacGregor logic thrice over. The critics, to come closer to the moment, didn't like nine out of the thirteen plays produced just prior to *Down To Miami* and neither did the audiences, with the result that the plays either closed in quick order or continued desperately at a financial loss.

Some years ago, the late Edgar Selwyn paved the way for Mr. MacGregor and his interview. He also gave out that a play of his, *Anything Can Happen*, was not a critics' play but an audience play and that the critics wouldn't care for it. They didn't. The audience didn't either, and the play shut down instanter.

Mr. MacGregor observed yet further that *Down To Miami* would appeal only to people who like the old formula sort of thing. How, to pursue the argument, did that in his mind eliminate the critics? If ever there was an instance of the old formula sort of thing in drama we have had it in *Anna Lucasta*, and the great majority of the critics have loved it.

The only sliver of intelligence indicated by Mr. MacGregor was in his statement that the critics wouldn't like *Down To Miami*. He certainly had something there. But

he goes down to the end of the class for his belief that audiences would. On the opening night there weren't enough people left in the house after the second act to fill a telephone booth. On the second night the intake was fifty-five dollars. On the third night it was forty-five. Thereafter, the show played only to the ushers.

STAR TIME. SEPTEMBER 12, 1944

A variety show. Produced by Paul Small at \$2.50 a head for 120 performances in the Majestic Theatre.

PRINCIPALS

Lou Holtz, Benny Fields, the De Marcos, the Berry Brothers, Shirley Dennis, the Mulcays, the Whitson Brothers, Armand Cortez, Francine Boreau, and George Prosperity.

ASIDE FROM Lou Holtz, who resembles a bored non-Aryan Noel Coward, acts like a bored Aryan Willie Howard and was as comically juicy as ever, and the De Marcos, who never danced more attractively, one might just as well, so far as vaudeville was concerned, have gone up to Central Park, looked at the seal, and saved money. It is possible that vaudeville may not yet be dead but Mr. Small, the present entrepreneur, had need of a lot better sulfa drugs, aside from the two specified, to persuade his critics of the fact.

Even when acrobats are good I, for one, will give you all of them for a single joke like Holtz's about Honeysuckle Epstein and his automobile that went so fast a pursuing cop thought his motorcycle had stopped and got off. And when, like the Whitson Brothers, they indulge in what they imagine to be humorous conversation while performing their tricks, I'll give them to you for not even the joke. You may also have for a cent male crooners like Benny Fields who, resplendent in Broadway tuxedos, vocalize like blast factories into microphones, accompany themselves by tapping their left feet, and emphasize the final notes by sweeping their opera hats off their heads. And for the same cent, or one like it, I'll present you with all the super-blondes like Shirley Dennis who evidently admire Betty Hutton out of all proportion and scream their songs into a microphone, the meanwhile vibrating their torsos and throwing italic fists at the audience. And when, like Miss Dennis, they con-

clude their handsome bequests by making exits beaming and bowing like so many Flagstads at the height of latter's careers, I'll let you owe me the cent.

I further am not overly enchanted by harmonica players, aside maybe from Larry Adler, and then not much. So far as the Mulcays plus microphone go, I do not consider that a charge of two cents would be unduly swindling you. As for the Berry Brothers and their Negro strutting and cane-twirling, I have seen them do the same routine for so many years now that the only variety they impart to any so-called variety show lies in their color. And the sketch performed by the Messrs. Cortez and Prosperity and Mlle. Bordeau was stale stuff even before a Lambs Club Gambol some years ago cabbaged the idea from one shown in the Paris revue theatre at least twenty-five years before.

Previous to the opening, Mr. Small issued a statement saying that rather than waste money on expensive scenery he preferred to give the customers entertaining performers. To accomplish this, he stated that it would cost him 13,500 dollars a week to operate the show, the chief expense item being Holtz's weekly honorarium of 3,000 dollars. If Mr. Small had raised Holtz's reward to 4,000 dollars, had allowed the 750 dollars for the De Marcos, and had booted the rest of the performers, he might have saved 8,750 dollars and would still have had a very much better show.

WHILE THE SUN SHINES
SEPTEMBER 19, 1944

A comedy by Terence Rattigan. Produced by Max Gordon for 39 performances in the Lyceum Theatre.

P R O G R A M

HORTON	J. P. Wilson	THE DUKE OF AYR AND STIRLING
THE EARL OF HARPENDE	<i>Stanley Bell</i>	<i>Melville Cooper</i>
LIEUTENANT MULVANEY	<i>Lewis Howard</i>	<i>LIEUTENANT COLBERT</i>
LADY ELIZABETH RANDALL	<i>Anne Burr</i>	<i>Alexander Ivo</i> <i>MABEL CRUM</i> <i>Cathleen Cordell</i>

SYNOPSIS: The action passes in the sitting-room of Lord Harpenden's chambers in the Albany, London. Act I. Morning. Act II. Scene 1. Eleven o'clock at night. Scene 2. Four hours later. Act III. Morning.

THE INCREASING general decline of the English theatre is to be appreciated in no more rueful manner than by contemplating what has happened, for instance, to its comedy writing, once and long its boast and joy. With John van Druten having renounced his British citizenship and now sometime since in the American fold, there remains no younger writer of any even remotely sound quality in that field, and the older men are either on the retired list or have indicated a calamitous ebb. Noel Coward still occasionally tosses off one of his powdered baubles, which in the prevailing drought is slavered out of all degree to its merits, and once in a while some other middle-aged youth or less pubescent writer contrives a specimen that gets by with the no longer particular London audience, but not since Ashley Dukes delivered *The Man With A Load Of Mischief* has a single comedy of authentic style made an appearance. Mr. Rattigan, the author of the present importation, provides a first-rate example of the besetting condition.

In *French Without Tears*, Mr. Rattigan's directly previ-

ous comedy, three men make a play for a provocative young woman who keeps them on emotional pins and needles. In this *While The Sun Shines*, his latest, three men make a play for a provocative young woman who keeps them on emotional pins and needles. Mr. Rattigan may not be said to be a man of boundless imagination.

There is nevertheless something that may be said for him. Unlike so many other young English playwrights, he deals with the emotions of normal people, which comes as a relief. For some years now we have been treated in English imports to so much degeneracy, perversion, and psychopathic aberration that the mere sight of a character putting his arms around a woman and kissing her is in the nature of a sensational dramatic event.

Review these British benefactions in the later seasons. In one, *Night Must Fall*, we were regaled with a pervert whose pleasure consisted in murdering females, cutting them up, and treasuring their severed heads in hat-boxes. In *Love From A Stranger*, we were invited to attend a diseased intellect whose passion was marrying for the delight it provided him in strangling his successive wives. In both *Wise Tomorrow* and *Love Of Women*, on the other hand, we were bidden to relish the spectacle of Lesbian amour. And in a number of plays like *Oscar Wilde* we were requested in turn to observe additional manifestations of homosexuality. *They Walk Alone* attempted to enchant us with a female pervert whose sensual gratification was achieved through letting the mortal blood out of any male corpus with which she came into contact, and *Murder Without Crime* sought to elevate us with not one but two male degenerates, one a sadist and the other a blighted neurotic who couldn't control his homicidal eccentricities. *Design For Living* offered us a pretty picture of impertinent effeminacy, and *Point Valaine* a male whose reaction to females was to spit into their faces. *Black Limelight* promoted a nyctalopian curio who, whenever darkness fell, could not resist the impulse to make away with any female he encountered; *Guest In The House* gifted us with a woman whose taint took the form of insinuating foul thoughts into the

minds of other women; and further exhibits like *Ladies In Retirement*, *Angel Street*, *Hand In Glove*, *The Stranger*, et al., have bespoken our notice with an increased variety of morbid, depraved, and rotten fruits.

Under such circumstances an occasional London importation, whatever its lack of quality, which deals with people one might possibly encounter this side of a clinic has something, albeit slight, to recommend it to an American theatregoer who, while not in the least concerned with morality, has nevertheless been surfeited with endless amateur treatments of its opposite.

Mr. Rattigan, whose play amounts to little more than a machine-made box-office tool, rusted, has gone down deep into the old wastebasket for his observations and his characters. His young Earl who talks about class distinctions in reverse is a quotation from John Drinkwater's *Bird In Hand* of sixteen years ago. His cadging, reprobate old Lordship is out of French comedy of the remote Caillavet-Flers era. His whimsical prostitute of the ingratiating manner stems from Frederick Lonsdale's *Spring Cleaning* and two dozen plays before and since. His amorous Frenchman is the rubber-stamp amorous stage Frenchman of the last sixty years. His manservant with the impeccable manner is an alumnus of more English plays than one can remember. His American with his "wows," his slapping of women on their rears, and his general "homely charm" is the recognizable character out of English and Continental exhibits without number. And his young woman of the aristocracy who succumbs to the attractions of a commoner has in one form or another already appeared in so many plays on both sides of the Atlantic that it would take an adding machine to arrive at the figure.

His devices are not less familiar. The woman who tries to hide a tear professes to have got a cinder in her eye, although George S. Kaufman's otherwise passable direction permitted so ceaseless an eye-blinking on the part of most of the other actors, notably Anne Burr and Lewis Howard, that at times it seemed almost everybody in the cast had suffered cinders. The lovers who play their sentimental

scene back to back is the same old childish invention that we got regularly in the plays of the De Mille *The Lost Paradise* era, which was some fifty years ago. The exhausted butler who tries vainly to get a needed wink of sleep on the drawing-room couch is recalled from the period of R. C. Carton, which was some forty years ago. The scene in which Lady Elizabeth becomes intoxicated and warms up to a stranger is a paraphrase of one of the frequently used scenes in plays of the *The Man From Blankley's* epoch, which was also some forty years ago. The lady of position who enters the house unexpectedly and is mistaken for the lady of loose morals who was expected has been in evidence in one shape or another since the days of the Elizabethans, which was some centuries ago. And so on.

I do not know the play in its original form but, though the program failed to note the fact, it is clear that Mr. Kaufman has toyed with any number of the lines. The allusions to the OWI and to the whiskey being of the pre-Roosevelt period; the reference to an apartment being known in England as chambers, with the duly anticipated joke about chambers; the American woman who married a title and is now working at Woolworth's; such slang as wise-guy; the whimsy about Mistinguette — these and other garnishes have an unmistakable Kaufman ring to them.

The play, in short, has a few amusing moments, among them his Lordship's idiotic telephone conversation with a crony who seems to be still at the racetrack at midnight and his Lordship's speculation as to whether the horses haven't probably gone home, but it gradually peters out into nothingness and ends on a curtain that might profitably in view of patent padding have been lowered at least fifteen minutes earlier. Like the remark about a negligible man of whom one can't think to say anything better than that "he has a nice face," it may also charitably be allowed that the play has a nice face. Its externals are fairly acceptable. But its internals do not make the slightest impression.

Melville Cooper, acting his Lordship in broad musical comedy style, was personally a humorous delight, despite the obtruding scent of his materials. As the American bom-

bardier, Lewis Howard looked like a younger Wendell Willkie and acted like a Lennie out of a *Of Mice And Men* directed by Helena Rubinstein. Alexander Ivo, as the Frenchman, comported himself elaborately like the usual stage Frenchman; Stanley Bell, as the young Earl with Adam's apple, evidently admires Noel Coward as a pin-up boy and patterned his acting accordingly; Cathleen Cordell, as the good-natured trollop, was savoury; and Anne Burr, as Lady Elizabeth, confused her larynx with her nose.

KORB'N. SEPTEMBER 20, 1944

A melodrama by David Blum. Produced by Modern Play Productions, Inc., for 24 performances in the Provincetown Playhouse.

PROGRAM

SALLY KLEIN	<i>Josephine Lombardo</i>	HAROLD STERN	<i>Melvin Davis</i>
ABRAHAM COHEN	<i>John Francis</i>	MRS. BLUMENTHAL	
SAMMY COHEN	<i>Robert Feyti</i>		<i>Blanche Rohmier</i>
HARRY SHULMAN	<i>Noah Jason</i>	DISTRICT ATTORNEY	
JOE BERKOWITZ	<i>James Gale</i>		<i>Norman Danneman</i>
MR. CAPLAN	<i>Cae Johnston</i>	RABBI JAMES GOLDSTEIN	
MR. MANDELBAUM	<i>Peter Zube</i>		<i>Cornelius T. Frizell</i>
JAKE GOLDBERG	<i>Ralph Arnold</i>	JOE SNYDER	<i>Raymond Lehrer</i>
AGNES RYAN	<i>Sally Hughes</i>		
ISIDORE SHULMAN			
	<i>Joseph Di Stefano</i>		

The scenes are laid in the Cohen apartment, the pressing-room of a dress factory, a slum street, and a courtroom. Place. New York City. Time. 1935.

THE AUTHOR ATTEMPTS a saga of a young labor union agitator which begins with his desertion of his fiancée that he may give his all to the cause and ends with his arrest as the killer of a scab workman. The writing is at once intense, like jungle fever, and unrelievedly amateurish. Mr. Blum is evidently a life subscriber to the *New Masses*; he might better have invested some of the money in plays like Hauptmann's *The Weavers* and Galsworthy's *Strife*. Like many another novice who looks to the small alley theatres for an outlet to his sociological indignations, his dramatic competence is hardly of a piece with his passion to show the world what is wrong with it.

The presentation in its entirety, including the acting, was on the minor apprentice side, and the Provincetown Playhouse once again lived down to its later-day reputation.

THE ODDS ON MRS. OAKLEY
OCTOBER 2, 1944

A farce, originally and successively called It Runs In The Family, Fanny and Our Fanny, by Harry Segall. Produced by Robert Reud for 24 performances in the Cort Theatre.

P R O G R A M

OLIVER OAKLEY	<i>John Archer</i>	LOUIE	<i>John Efrat</i>
SUSAN OAKLEY	<i>Joy Hodges</i>	LA VERNE	<i>Betty E. Haynes</i>
THE PROFESSOR	<i>Morton L. Stevens</i>	JIM	<i>Don Darcy</i>
EDDIE	<i>Ben Laughlin</i>	JIM'S WIFE	<i>Sally Gabler</i>
DENNIE	<i>Hildegarde Halliday</i>	HOWARD STICKNEY	<i>Bruce MacFarlane</i>
GLADYS	<i>Virginia Reed</i>		
SAM	<i>Allen Kearns</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Private booth in safe deposit vault of bank. Noon.* Scene 2. *Turf Club cocktail lounge at race track. A year later.* Scene 3. *Susan's apartment. Three months later.* Act II. Scene 1. *Turf Club cocktail lounge. Three months later.* Scene 2. *Susan's apartment. Two weeks later.* Scene 3. *Same. Evening. Ten days later.*

The Present Time. New York City.

THE CHANCES in these later years that any kind of play dealing with a race horse will be of popular entertainment value are small, and the contribution in immediate question proved to be no exception. Half a century ago, even a quarter of a century ago, things were different and a host of melodramas and comedies concerned with such animals caught the fancy of the public. They ranged all the way from melodramas like *In Old Kentucky* and *The Whip* and comedies like *Checkers* to melodramas like *Blue Grass* and *The Derby Winner* and comedies like *The County Fair* and, with minor variation, usually promoted either the spectacle of a horse being affectionately kissed on the nose by the heroine, for whom the winning of the race meant life or death, with the words, "Go in and win, Rosebud, go in and win, and God bless you, darling!", and then being led offstage for a race subsequently described by the wide-

eyed and breathless heroine to the audience, or the spectacle of the race itself on a treadmill which made so much noise that the audience generally thought the winning jockey must be General Phil Sheridan.

These plays were shortly followed by others, mainly comedies like *Wildfire*, which while abandoning the treadmill still did not forego the kiss on the horse's nose, and farces like *If I Had Money*, in which the horse was kept offstage and its track activities again frantically reported on by several male characters whose fortunes rested on its superior speed. But it was not long thereafter that the public taste, which even then had given unmistakable signs of surfeit, resolved the signs into fact, and salads of the species soon went into the discard, at least temporarily. After a proper lapse of time, however, they began intermittently, though in negligible number, to reappear but, with one exception, without the success which they formerly enjoyed. That exception was *Three Men On A Horse*, shown in 1934. Other exhibits like, for example, *Horse Fever* quickly expired from lack of public interest.

The approach to the subject in the more recent years has uniformly altered. Whereas in the earlier periods the theme was, as noted, handled in terms of melodrama or comedy, it now became primarily the material for farce. No longer, apparently, were audiences willing to expend their emotions trembling in their seats over the ritual of two or three nags exerting themselves on a rotary apparatus on behalf of a mortgage on the heroine's old home or the salvation of the hero's economic future from a knave who had thought cunningly to insert a splinter in the favorite's foot. And no longer, it seemed, were they to be cajoled by the relatively milder form of entertainment wherein it was difficult to determine whether the genial little hero, often either a track clocker or a young man of reputable antecedents whom the fates had made a bookie, was in love with a woman or a mare. With the endless repetitions, the whole business had become laughable — and farce was arbitrarily the only way out. Thus the horse itself disappeared permanently from the stage, and the only time one has been

viewed by an audience in many years was in the before-mentioned farce, *Horse Fever*, in which the poor beast was arbitrarily brought on for a few moments solely for burlesque purposes.

The horse farces, such as they have been when they have showed up at all, have confined the performances of the animals to the wings and have visited what racing the audiences have been permitted to see upon the actors. These latter have most frequently been directed into such speed contests against the scripts as have made the old treadmill chases seem sedentary. Matters came to the point; indeed, where members of an audience who were racetrack devotees would willingly have backed a director like George Abbott against War Admiral, and would have laid liberal odds. And it again wasn't long before evidence presented itself that the customers of such entertainment had begun to lose their enthusiasm for selling-plater farce maneuvered into a semblance of the thoroughbred species, nor was it longer that it became clear that if farce dealing with racing were to survive at all someone would have to write one that had something to recommend it aside from the old-time basic plot mechanics and the new-time directorial confusion of the actors with the horses.

Mr. Segall's attempt was simply another in the line of corposes. It revolved about a race horse, the divided property of a divorced couple that won only when in the custody of the woman, which throughout the evening was kept off-stage and never appeared. Mr. Segall made a big mistake. If he had brought the horse on and kept his actors off his farce might have gained some of the velocity that it lacked and sorely needed. Furthermore, not only pace but humor, which is widely rumored to be a desirable element of farce, was similarly concealed in the wings. In its stead the author trotted out the oldest joke in racing play history, "Don't you believe in reciprocity?" with the query, "What race is he in?" and followed it up with such beauties as "My ears burn" with the retort, "If you're wrong, something else about you will burn!"; "What'll you drink?" with the answer, "Just plain soda — with Bourbon"; "You can have a

pair of my nylons" with the husband's reply, "Thanks, but they're not my size"; and divers simultaneous plays on the horse's name, Fanny, and the posteriors of the ladies in the company. Things continued in that tempo until toward the end of the evening, when the author's invention achieved a grand climax in the report of the race over a radio.

The stable of actors included, among other spavined histrions, a choice leading woman who alluded to one of the male characters as a "congeneral idiot" and, whenever the script demanded that one character or another proclaim, "Gosh, you're beautiful!", acquiescently screwed up her features like a corduroy sponge, the meanwhile furiously opening and shutting her eyes, painted a rich Navy blue, like the doors in an 1890 French farce. And the stage direction had the company indulge in so ceaseless a walking around tables, chairs, sofas, and floor lamps in the belief that it constituted dramatic action that by ten o'clock the actors were almost as exhausted as the audience.

Mr. Reud, the producer, is reported to rely upon astrology for guidance in his theatrical activities. On this occasion he might better have consulted a book on theatrical statistics and saved himself a deal of money. He might have learned what astrology apparently didn't reveal; to wit, that, along with plays about baseball, plays about horse racing haven't with the single exception previously noted made a nickel in the last twenty years.

MEN TO THE SEA. OCTOBER 3, 1944

A play by Herbert Kuby. Produced by Dave Wolper for 23 performances in the National Theatre.

PROGRAM

HAZEL	Maggie Gould	REUBEN	Maurice Ellis
CHRISTABEL	Toni Gilman	HOWARD MOORE	James Alexander
NIC	Joe Verdi	HYACINTH	Mildred Smith
MADAME MOSH	Grace Mills	FRENCH SAILOR	James Elliott
JULIE	Joyce Mathews	DICK GRAHAM	Frank Etherton
BONNIE	Susana Garnett	HUGHES	Bill Hunt
JOE FOSTER	Tom Noonan	TALL GIRL	Mary Jean Copeland
DUCKWORTH	Randolph Echols	RED	Marguerite Clifton
BROPHY	Richard Camp	HARRY	Paul Crabtree
CHAUNCEY	Michael Strong		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. Christabel's room on the first floor of a rooming house in Brooklyn, late afternoon of September of a war year. Scene 2. Christabel's room the next afternoon. Scene 3. Hazel's room, late that night. Scene 4. Christabel's room, an evening ten days later. Act II. Scene 1. Hazel's room on Christmas Eve, four months later. Scene 2. A gun tub on the deck of the destroyer Christabel, on Christmas Eve. Act III. Scene 1. Christabel's room on an evening in the first week of the following June. Scene 2. Christabel's room at twilight two days later.

THE CHIEF INTEREST provided by the play was in the moral alarms it set into motion. Its theme, the infidelity of the wives of sailors in the armed forces, so aroused the indignation, patriotic and otherwise, of various people and was so denounced out of hand during the New Haven and Boston try-out period that the gravely disturbed management was driven, previous to the New York engagement, to call its publicity agents into the breach with excerpts from two sources attesting to the theme's substantiality. The first was from an article in *Time* which allowed, among other things, that an Army chaplain had said, "American women have failed their fighting men. The men come in and tell me that they are going to divorce their wives. After

a man has flown seventy or ninety missions over Europe, laying his life on the block to protect his home and then finds his home has been wrecked by infidelity, there is little I can tell him to convince him he should forgive and forget. I know of one G.I. married ten years who got a letter in Kiska from his wife asking him for a divorce. A pilot in the Thirteenth Air Force on Guadalcanal, also married for a long time, got a letter from his wife whom he hadn't seen for eighteen months saying, 'I'm pregnant. I'll explain when I see you.'"

Fearing that this single testimonial might not be sufficiently convincing, a second was hurled at the skeptics by way of a devastating climactic punch. It was from no less authoritative a source than Dorothy Dix's syndicated newspaper column and was signed "Five Desperate Girls." It read: "We are five girls who are very close friends and now we all face the same difficulty. Just before Pearl Harbor we met five Army officers with whom we fell in love and married. Because of parental objection we kept this a secret. Now our husbands are insisting that we reveal our marriages and come to them, but the trouble is that one of our group is going to have a baby who is not the child of her husband, and if we go back to our husbands it will expose our double lives to our parents. Also, our husbands will know that we have been untrue to them. We had planned to go to a distant city and get work. There the baby would be born and could be given for adoption and neither our parents or the husbands would be the wiser. And if we refuse to go to our husbands, they will suspect that we have been untrue and demand to know why we did not come to them. What would be the best thing to do?"

That the umbrage of the moral objectors to the play was not materially lessened by the document was perhaps to be explained in their pardonable suspicion that it was the sly work of the play's management, since the play was found also to deal with five wives, one of whom was also going to have a baby not an issue of her husband, and with the others in the main also untrue to their lawful mates.

Although objection to the play on grounds of patriotic

morale was understandable, objection to it on factual grounds, despite such touching evidence as provided by Miss Dix, was open to some question. And assuredly there could be no sound condemnation of it on dramatic grounds, since the theme of a wife's infidelity to a husband long away has without improbation served the drama for innumerable years, even the drama in uniform. What entertained the critic was rather the moralists' apparently tacit, if under the circumstances somewhat puzzling, acceptance of infidelity on the part of the husbands. Things would seem to be looking up in moral quarters.

In both New Haven and Boston virtuous indignation reached such a pitch that further performances were possible only after all kinds of excisions were made in the script and all kinds of changes made in the staging. In New Haven, for example, a figure of the Virgin was peremptorily ordered out on the ground that the characters were indulging in sex talk, though the idea of substituting for it a figure of Christ was genially endorsed.

In both cities the authorities forbade a slight jazzing up of the hymn "Silent Night" and nothing could persuade them to alter their stand. "You can't do that with a song that's religious!" they affirmed. It is apparent that the education of the authorities in question has not embraced religious music in any of its phases. "Onward, Christian Soldiers" is, in the words of a late Harvard professor and able critic, "set to the militant religiosity of Baring Gould's un-Christ-like words," and has been frequently used as a football song. The "Good Friday" music from *Parsifal* is, as everyone else knows, of sexuality all compact and follows a puzzled wonder over the gayety of Nature on the Day of Agony. Honneger's "King David" oratorio is not without its jazz passages, and "Yes, We Have No Bananas" is derived in part from Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus." There are points in common between "Nearer, My God, To Thee" and that old booze party favorite, "Goodbye, My Bluebell." And the variations upon "Silent Night" to which the authorities wrathfully objected were foreshadowed years before in a ragtime parody called "Silent Newt."

which never got a complaining peep in Boston when sung by the visiting minstrel show troupes.

Men To The Sea is a poor play but it is not a dirty or a blasphemous play and the Boston censure of it was only a further sign of that city's psychosomatic morality. I do not like dirt whether in ears, steamed clams or the drama, but if the bedroom scene in Kubly's play is dirty, as Boston insisted it was and ordered deleted, then the bedroom scene in *The Voice Of The Turtle*, which Boston passed and which isn't dirty either, nevertheless is or should be twice as dirty from the Boston viewpoint. As for New Haven and its attitude toward religious music, matters are probably to be forgiven, since it is obvious that its moral cops' musical experience does not extend much beyond "Boolah Boolah."

Kubly's effort to mix religion and sex has been far from fortunate in the eyes of drama criticism, but no one may contend that he has not been perfectly honest in his effort or that he has been deliberately and calculatingly smutty. His play, muddled and amateurish though it be, is as a matter of fact a lot cleaner than any number of plays with similar themes which have been welcomed by church and lay authorities.

This whole business of plays that touch on religion calls for a going-over in the interests of censorship clarification. If *Men To The Sea* is censorable, what, for example, of some of the early Passion Plays — the *Passion Of Revello* for one, or of the early Festival Plays — *The Feast Of The Ass* and *Feast Of Fools* for two, or of the early Mystery Plays — *The Baptism Of The Virgin* for one? And when it comes to what in the moralists' eyes is sacrilegious, why not go the whole hog and consider, yes consider even today, at least in New Haven and Boston, the treatment of the cloth in Sudermann's *The Fires Of St. John*, Synge's *The Tinker's Wedding* and Henry Arthur Jones's *The Crusaders* and *The Hypocrites*? To say nothing of in the plays of Ibsen, Hauptmann, Björnson, and others? If we must have censorship, let us, to repeat, at least try to get a little logic into it.

It is a far cry from the wives of absent Army flyers as

depicted by Moss Hart in *Winged Victory* to those of absent sailors as depicted by Kubly. Whereas Hart saw his girls entirely in terms of such tutti-frutti dialogue as "Oh God, if they don't come back I don't think I can bear it!", Kubly sees his for the most part in terms of such as "Jeez, if they do come back they'll catch us, damn it, with our boyfriends!" Since my social life, such as it is, hasn't brought me into contact with the lonely wives of either flyers or sailors, I am not one to say which of the two pictures is the more accurate. But since my critical life brings me into contact with all sorts of plays, I can say that, poor as it is, Kubly's is at least the better of the two, which isn't saying much, or in fact anything at all.

It is often the mark of a novice playwright — this is Kubly's first effort — either to oversensationalize sex or to view it dreamily as a kind of Swedenborgian deep-breathing exercise. Kubly does both at one and the same time. It is also often the mark of a novice to accompany the latter treatment with quotations and parallels from the Scriptures, interlarded with little touches of one or another of the romantic poets. Kubly duly indulges not only in the parallel of Jesus and the Magdalen but of Hosea and Gomer, and quotes François Villon, somewhat copiously, on the side. When the sex gets particularly hot, he even has recourse to Chaucer. Good plays, alas, are not written that way.

The heavy mixture of realism and symbolism, the latter involving the old business of falling autumn leaves and altar lights that hint at death by suddenly going out, would be a difficult hurdle for any director and it was to Eddie Dowling's credit that he managed to jump it theatrically with a measure of his old-time skill. Here and there the ingredients of the play led him into a strained and false ecclesiastical pattern, but in the main he succeeded in bringing some stage life to what was essentially merely a dummy upon which a valid playwright might have draped the materials of sound drama.

SOLDIER'S WIFE. OCTOBER 4, 1944

A play by Rose Franken. Produced by William Brown Meloney for 252 performances in the Golden Theatre.

PROGRAM

KATHERINE ROGERS	Martha Scott	ALEXANDER CRAIG	Glenn Anders
FLORENCE LANE	Frieda Inescort	PETER GRAY	Lili Darvas
JOHN ROGERS	Myron McCormick		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. An evening in late summer. Act II. An afternoon in early fall. Act III. Several days later.

The action of the play takes place in the Rogers' apartment in Manhattan.

The time is the present.

FOR ONE ACT the author has tried to write a play about the readjustment of the married life of a young wife and her returned soldier husband, has then given it up as a bad job and for the two following acts has turned it into a kind of parlor vaudeville that has next to nothing to do with her initial theme but that, while maybe not quite so amusing as Lou Holtz, is nevertheless not without its moments of entertainment. As a play the evening, considering some of Miss Franken's previous work, is a dark disappointment, but as a variety show in masquerade it is periodically diverting in its later stretches.

When the author, at the outset of the proceedings, sets herself to consider the problem of marital equilibration she discloses herself to be of a starkly superficial mind. When she throws the problem out of the window that same superficiality stands her in good stead, since nothing obviously would be so damaging to vaudeville as a suggestion of mentality, which was sufficiently proved last season in the depressing *Chauve-Souris*. As a fabricator of theatrical confetti she is superior to a philosophical wit, as may be appreciated from such of her attempts in the latter direction as "People who have gone through things are never sentimental." Her

observations, too, are essentially out of the old mothbag as, for example, "There's nothing that makes you feel sadder than hearing a train whistle at night," along with things like "the mystic look in soldiers' eyes." And her dramatic writing, involving such hoary lines as "I don't know whether to laugh or cry," actually resorts to such even hoarier devices as "You say he's due here at 4:30; why, it's almost that now!" As a playwright of critical merit, Miss Franken is here with small standing in the community.

It is rather as a parlor entertainer that she earns, as the French say, her beefsteak. In that capacity, she occasionally gets off some fairish nifties and rewards the light in mind and heart with a pleasant triviality. Even if one be not given to uncontrollable spasms over jokes about new antique furniture and corned beef and cabbage there are probably others to serve as a periodic anodyne.

What the consignment in the aggregate amounts to is, however, little more than a paraphrase of its author's *Claudia* commercially designed for devotees of the art of trained seals and ZaSu Pitts. It is only intermittently, as noted, that some humor derived from character and palatable to the more particular taste emerges. Miss Franken has talent and even when she deliberately sacrifices it to the box-office, as in this case, it can not entirely resist her. But it is to be regretted, since she doesn't need the money, that she does not continue to apply her gifts to the more reputable drama as represented by her last season's *Outrageous Fortune*.

She is also surely above the brand of much of the humor which she peddles on this occasion. When, in addition to the samples before mentioned, she places in the mouth of her pro-tem bachelor character such stuff as "The nearest I'll ever get to a baby is the Stork Club"; when she goes in for such Hollywood jokes as the one about people having two big houses with swimming pools and living in hotels; when she follows them up with the wife's whimsy that her husband is acting so sweetly one would think he wasn't married to her; and when, not content with the other stale jocosities about Hollywood, she indulges in the one about

it making no difference whether a writer for the movies can write — when she vouchsafes such frayed and faded minstrelsy, one is to be forgiven for wishing to spank her apparent passion for easy mazuma. After all, there is such a thing as pride, or should be.

She even goes to the extent, in general cheap writing, of merchanting lines like "How would I know what's going on in that foolish little head of yours?" As the author of the before-noted *Outrageous Fortune* she must shudder while she pockets the box-office intake.

In the role of the young wife, Martha Scott once again confused the business of gazing intently with set, open eyes with the business of convincing "listening." Myron McCormick indicated some development as a comedian in the part of the soldier husband, though his pink makeup was a bit confounding in view of the wife's remark, upon his return from the battle front, that he was so awfully brown. Glenn Anders, as the much married bachelor, handled what occasional humor was provided him with droll effect; Lili Darvas, as the editor of a woman's page, was quite charming for all one's speculation as to what an Hungarian was doing on the *Herald Tribune*; and Frieda Inescort had little to do, and did it, in a sister-in-law role that was mainly seated on a couch and instructed to be sedate.

BLOOMER GIRL. OCTOBER 5, 1944

A musical show, music by Harold Arlen, lyrics by E. Y. Hburg, and book by Sig Herzig and Fred Saidy from an produced play by Lilith and Dan James. Produced by J C. Wilson in association with Nat Goldstone for a far yond the season run in the Shubert Theatre.

PROGRAM

SERENA	Mabel Taliaferro	HIRAM CRUMP	Dan Galla
OCTAVIA	Pamela Randell	DOLLY	Margaret Dou
LYDIA	Claudia Jordan	JEFF CALHOUN	David Bi
JULIA	Toni Hart	PAULA	Lee B
PHOEBE	Carol MacFarlane	PRUDENCE	Eleanor J
DELIA	Nancy Douglass	HETTY	Arlene Ande
DAISY	Joan McCracken	BETTY	Eleanor W
HORATIO	Matt Briggs	HAMILTON CALHOUN	Blaine Co
GUS	John Call	POMPEY	Dooley W
EVELINA	Celeste Holm	SHERIFF QUIMBY	Charles Ho
JOSHUA DINGLE	Robert Lyons	AUGUSTUS	Hubert Dil
HERMAN BRASHER	William Bender	ALEXANDER	Richard I
EBENEZER MIMMS	Joe E. Marks	STATE OFFICIAL	John
WILFRED THRUSH	Vaughn Trinnier	GOVERNOR NEWTON	Butler F

*The action takes place in Cicero Falls, a small Eastern manufa
ing town, in the spring of 1861.*

THE GREAT SUCCESS of the show suggested that audie were beginning to be *gobemouches* for almost anythin the old Americana line. With *Oklahoma!* pointing the and with this contribution following suit there was pro of similar baits invoking a lucrative nostalgic response i souls born long years after the particular periods dealt but vicariously permitting themselves knowing and ex sive sighs over times and places which they never ex enced and could accordingly hardly either recall or When next they disclose a show about, say, the tender ple, innocent life in the Chicago of 1886 and I observe audience wistfully basking in its pathos-of-distance]

going to get the more venerable members of it to join my venerable self in putting on forthwith a revival of the Hay-market riots, which somehow inconsiderately horned into the picture in the same year.

Aside from some handsome sets and costumes by Lemuel Ayres and Miles White, the exhibit, though hailed by most of the reviewers with adjectives that made the Ringling Brothers' press agents seem like mutes, with writer's cramp, escapes my powers of appreciation. So torpid are the proceedings that even a pair of Agnes de Mille ballets augment its pace. The book, despite a valid enough idea in aligning an orthodox manufacturer of hoopskirts against a female champion of bloomers, is heavily overblown and dreary. There is so much talk in the first of the two acts that I began to feel that I had perhaps got into the wrong place and was at a party over at Dorothy Thompson's, with George Sokolsky. And when it comes to humor, I find it very easy to restrain any excessive mirth over such lines as "I want bosom companions, not just bosoms" or over a confusion of the word "posternity" with "posterior." I am not awfully particular; I have even laughed once at Zero Mostel; but if stuff like that constitutes the height of wit, as some of my colleagues imply, I am too weak to scale it.

There was also a deal of enthusiasm over Mr. Arlen's score. Just how anyone with the slightest appreciation of music could persuade himself that a juke-box tune like "Evelina" was nigh Mozartian in its compositional beauty or that any of the rest of Mr. Arlen's songs were enough to make Victor Herbert turn green with envy in his grave and drive Jerome Kern and Richard Rodgers into shamed hiding remains something of a puzzle. And no less a puzzle were the tributes to the striking originality of Mr. Harburg's lyrics having to do with "It Was Good Enough For Grandma," "Rakish Young Man With The Whiskers," "Farmer's Daughter," and "When The Boys Come Home."

The presence of a Negro male singer was similarly the occasion for considerable rapture on the part of most of the reviewers and all of the public. However, it generally is bringing a Negro male singer into a show these days ha-

taken the place of bringing on the Marines in those of other days. It saves the situation when things do not look too good. Let a show give signs of sagging and all one seemingly has to do to restimulate the customers is to introduce a colored man, preferably a deep bass or baritone, and dress him in a blue shirt and ragged trousers. It seldom misses. Whether he has talent or not doesn't especially matter; the customers are sure to applaud him by way of handsome indication of their lack of race prejudice and their admirable, democratic openmindedness. It is accordingly next to impossible for a Negro to fail on the stage nowadays. I certainly do not mean to reflect on Negroes in the slightest; I am all for them. But just the same they have a big edge in the theatre over their white brothers and sisters. If you don't believe it, consult the records. Not one colored actor and but one colored actress in the drama or on the musical stage has in the last half dozen years got the bad break that many of the whites occasionally have.

Returning to the matter of the show's book which, as noted, enjoys a substantial basic idea and one possible of amusing treatment, the Hollywood Messrs. Herzig and Saidy have made nothing of it. The feud between the rich hoopskirt manufacturer and his sister-in-law patroness of pantalettes, with his daughter rebelliously siding with her aunt, is resolved into little more than an obvious paraphrase of some such time-dishonored musical show plot as the objection of a father to his daughter's marriage to the man of her heart, with the main theme itself confined largely to the period costumes. In addition, the twain have seen fit, by way of posing themselves as possessors of an acute if somewhat belated social consciousness, to overload their story with so considerable a to-do about women's rights, abolition of slavery and such that about the only thing which they seem to have neglected is a consideration of Stephen A. Douglas' advocacy of squatter sovereignty in terms of the New Deal. And when they are not intruding such questions into their book they are introducing so much news about the firing on Fort Sumter, the early production of the controversial *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and like cullings

from the *Encyclopædia Britannica* that one waits momentarily for the Pony Express, the first visit to America of the Prince of Wales, the appearance of Jefferson Davis, and a courier, covered with paper snowflakes, bearing the tidings of Queen Victoria's proclamation of neutrality.

The theory that musical show books must generally and necessarily be that bad, to which one or two of the acquiescently enthusiastic reviewers in this case have committed themselves, has been blown up so often in the past that one would think it long discarded. Any number of books from the days of Harry B. Smith and Henry Blossom, and before, to the more recent time of *Show Boat* and *Music In The Air* and a half-dozen others have been eminently acceptable. The book of *Bloomer Girl*, too, might easily have been bettered with a little imagination. The scene in the former bordello which now serves simply as the headquarters of a journal published by Dolly Bloomer and her aides, for example, might have been made genuinely amusing by introducing some of the girls who were formerly quartered therein, who have been on their uppers ever since the women's emancipation crusade got under successful way, and who protest heatedly against the ruinous new order of things. The eventual triumph of the campaign for bloomers as opposed to hoopskirts might similarly have been made satirically amusing by a rebellion of the men against the hideous habiliments, their determined neglect of the women made ugly by them, their pursuit of the first girl to show up again in lace panties, and the women's realization that, while emancipation in other directions may be meet, they can not emancipate themselves from feminine apparel and at the same time retain any sex appeal and hold their men. It would be simple to indicate various other such changes that would give the present routine book a little flavor.

The lyrics might also prosper from a bit of invention. The obviousness of Topsy's song "I Never Was Born" is implicit in its title. A lyric proudly attesting to her possible illegitimacy and specifying by name all her famous historical illegitimate relatives might have helped, as might

such an improvement on the emancipated women lyric as a doubtful speculation on just how much better a time after all such emancipated old girls as Susan B. Anthony, Carrie Chapman Catt, Frances Willard, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were going to enjoy in the world.

As for the Arlen music, it might have been ameliorating simply to have Walter Donaldson's old "Carolina In The Morning" in place of its paraphrase "Evelina," which is hailed as the show's masterpiece, or the old time "Ida" of blessed saloon memory instead of a gratuitous revamping.

Among the members of the troupe singled out for encomiums were Celeste Holm and Joan McCracken, both of whom had appeared previously in *Oklahoma!* Miss Holm is a prepossessing young woman but hasn't sufficient voice or a sufficiently strong personality to carry the leading role in a musical show which is essentially so passive that a scene on a doubly passive small town Sunday morning becomes the most exciting item in it. And Miss McCracken, who received such notices as in the past were customarily reserved for Ada Rehan, again merchanted a performance that for riotous cuteness probably has not been matched since the human doll act last appeared in the vaudeville halls. Someone should speak paternally to Miss McCracken and confide to her that making with the eyes, arching her posticus bulge, girlishly tossing her head about like a badminton quill, and comporting herself assiduously like a coy lambkin does not quite contribute to the impression that she is another Yvonne Printemps.

THE MERRY WIDOW. OCTOBER 7, 1944

A return engagement of the Franz Lehár-Victor Leon-Leo Stein operetta, with a revised book by Sidney Sheldon and Ben Roberts and with lyrics by Adrian Ross. Produced by the New Opera Company for a 4 weeks' engagement in the City Center Theatre.

PROGRAM

THE KING	John Harrold	PRINCE DANILO	Jan Kiepura
POPOFF	Karl Farkas	CLO-CLO	Lisette Verea
JOLIDON	Nils Landin	Lo-Lo	Annette Norman
NATALIE	Xenia Bank	FROU-FROU	Mary Broussard
OLGA BARDINI	Lucy Hillary	Do-Do	Babs Heath
GENERAL BARDINI	Gordon Dilworth	MARGOT	Alice Borbus
NOVAKOVICH	Alan Vaughan	JOU-JOU	Annette Norman
CASCADA	Dennis Dengate	PREMIERE DANSEUSES	Babs Heath, Nina Popova
KHADJA	Alfred Porter	PREMIER DANCER	Jack Gansert
NISH	Norman Budd	GASTON	John Harrold
SONIA SADOYA	Marta Eggerth		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. 1. Prologue. 2. The Marsovian embassy in Paris. A summer evening in the year 1906. Act II. Grounds of Sonia's house, near Paris: the following evening. Act III. Maxim's restaurant, Paris, later that same evening.

FOllowing a return engagement of eleven performances, beginning on September 27, of Helen Hayes in the shabby Ryerson-Clements treatise on Harriet Beecher Stowe called *Harriet*, the City Center pursued its theatrical activities with a return showing of the Lehár operetta in a performance which was a withering come-down from that offered in the Broadway production in the previous season. The two occasions gave still further dubious pause in the consideration of the basic merits of the municipality's theatrical scheme which up to this point had still resolved itself into a mere second-hand showshop, and for the major part a very poor second-hand one at that.

It has been argued that one of our contemporary theatre's greatest ills is the poverty in new playwriting talent and that the only hope of developing it lies in the establishment of professional community theatres and municipal theatres like this City Center. That the poverty exists there is little disputing, but that such theatres as are prayed for would quickly remedy the situation and give miraculous birth to a carload of whiteheaded young playwrights calls, I fear, for disputing of somewhat larger bulk.

The independent smaller theatres in the communities and colleges which have been in existence for some time now have not noticeably produced any considerable number of new, young gifted writers. In point of fact, with the exception of the Messrs. Richardson and Berney, authors of *Dark Of The Moon*, they have given birth to little or nothing. And even in such exceptional cases as they have uncovered some traces of talent they have rarely furthered them and have left the job to the impeached Broadway theatre. And as for other experimental theatres, they have not produced anything of any real merit in years.

In this last connection, the monitors are ever pointing back to Eugene O'Neill. It is true that the little Provincetown group gave O'Neill his first hearing, but only because O'Neill wanted it to be the first to give him a hearing. And it gave him a first hearing only with one-act plays. His initial full-length play was seized by the so-called commercial theatre immediately it got wind that there was such a manuscript. You may take my word for it, since I myself sent it along to a producer, the first to see it, who read it overnight and put it on as soon as he could. And if that same producer, John D. Williams, had been able to get hold of the one-act plays ahead of the Provincetowners he would gladly have produced them just as quickly.

It took the Broadway theatre and its collateral guilds and groups to give a hearing to Saroyan's best work, whereas the provincial little theatres have in the main contented themselves with his minor efforts, some of them very bad. Broadway and these contributory groups, not the theatres dreamed of by the visionaries, gave the early Lillian Hell-

man, S. N. Behrman, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, Rose Franken, Maxwell Anderson, Laurence Stallings, Robert Sherwood and Sidney Kingsley their first chances, as they did Clifford Odets, George Kaufman, Moss Hart, Marc Connelly, Elmer Rice, George Kelly, Sidney Howard, Robert Ardrey and almost every other playwright of any subsequent consequence of whom one can think. The non-Broadway theatre, on the other hand, rests its case wholly on Paul Green, Susan Glaspell, Arnold Sundgaard and several such others, of whom only Green has critically later amounted to anything.

Broadway gave the Maurine Watkins of *Chicago* a chance when no one else would. It gave the Hatcher Hughes of even *Hell-Bent Fer Heaven* a chance, and the Zona Gale of *Miss Lulu Bett*, and the Robert Turney of *Daughters of Atreus*. Damned for its commercialism and for its apathy to ambitious playwrights, it nevertheless has gambled its money over the years on such poets, often impracticable, as Lynn Riggs, Stanley Young, T. S. Eliot, Brian Hooker, and others. And it has been the Broadway theatre or its allied interests, not the hinterland art centers, that have brought to light all the more recent hopeful novices like William Bowers, Alexander Greendale and Margaret Curtis.

The idea, furthermore, that civic theatres would be the answer to a maiden playwright's prayer is on the doubtful side. Look at this New York venture in that direction, for just one weathervane. Thus far in its life it has confined itself simply to reproductions, mainly defective, of established Broadway plays and musical shows, and the only new talent it has given a chance are the ushers. To believe that the institution of a professional community theatre or a municipal theatre in, say, Toledo, Ohio, or Scranton, Pennsylvania, would result markedly otherwise and uncover such local dramaturgical genius as has not been heard of in the world since Molière showed up in the French provinces on the back of a wagon takes some rather heroic believing.

The pre-war German municipal theatres, which were

always pointed out in other countries, including our own, as being all that such theatres should be, were not the cradles of dramatic talent. That talent for the greater part first saw the light in other German theatres, as the records attest.

However, blaming Broadway for every misservice in the catalogue has become a habit and one can no more change it than one can get a waiter, for all one's prayers and injunctions otherwise, to serve one iced tea without the habitual slice of lemon. Broadway, true enough, is not without its faults — I could, if urged, nominate maybe two or three thousand — but its faults are hardly those almost always nominated in turn by its critics.

Another of the latter's indignations, for example, is Broadway's indifference to the classics. It is true that Broadway is not particularly noted for any steady enthusiasm in the way of revivals of the finer drama of the past, but neither for that matter, so far as I am able to make out, are the remote-from-Broadway theatres which are customarily whispered to be hotbeds of culture. The otherwise meritorious Pasadena, California, Playhouse, for one such, has indicated a much more consistent interest in revivals of Kaufman and Hart, George M. Cohan, Maxwell Anderson and Sidney Howard than in revivals of Sophocles, Aristophanes, Corneille, and Shakespeare. And the other admired theatres of a kidney have not to my knowledge concerned themselves unduly with the classics. But Broadway at its worst has at least given us productions in the last dozen years of no less than sixty-six of the classics, ancient and modern, and included have been the works of Sophocles, Shakespeare, Strindberg, Ibsen, Sheridan, Wycherley, Molière, Shaw, Rostand, Chekhov, Wilde, Gogol, Yeats, Synge, *et al.* Which isn't too terribly bad.

Urging as a cure for Broadway's grim malaise the further launching of theatres by municipalities, Arthur Hopkins, who is one of the current leading Thersites, has had this to say over the radio: "When cities take as great pride in their theatres as they do in their baseball teams, America will be growing up culturally and spiritually. That day is coming.

It is my hope that this radio program (*Arthur Hopkins Presents*) will accelerate its arrival."

Just how a radio program featuring such Broadway box-office plays as *The Late Christopher Bean*, *The Male Animal*, *Mr. Pim Passes By*, and *The Philadelphia Story* will assist in the cultural and spiritual growth of the nation appears to be Mr. Hopkins' secret.

Mr. Hopkins is a fine and upstanding fellow, and in his day served the theatre dutifully, but like so many complainants does not, one suspects, always ring the bell. "The economic burdens of the commercial theatre make venturesome production prohibitive," he says. He is right only to a degree. The economic burdens of the Broadway commercial theatre are certainly heavy, but they nevertheless have not made venturesome production prohibitive. All kinds of such venturesome productions have not only been made but have turned out to be financially successful. The trouble is that there simply are not enough venturers.

Among these venturesome productions that have succeeded in more recent years for all the alleged prohibitive cost have been *The Skin Of Our Teeth*, *The Time Of Your Life*, *Shadow And Substance*, *The Children's Hour*, *Abraham Lincoln*, *Juno And The Paycock*, *Winterset*, *Of Mice And Men*, *Death Takes A Holiday*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Last Mile*, *The Green Pastures*, *Uncle Vanya*, and *The Cherry Orchard*. Also *The Barretts Of Wimpole Street* (after 27 producers had refused to be venturesome), *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *Tobacco Road*, *Russet Mantle*, *Family Portrait*, *Ethan Frome*, *Lady Precious Stream*, *Our Town*, *Oscar Wilde*, and *The White Steed*. Also, and if you want further examples of venturesomeness, *Arsenic And Old Lace* and *Carmen Jones*. And that is only a small part of the story.

Mr. Hopkins' final, devastating criticism is as follows: "I believe the day is gone when America can look to Broadway for dramatic sustenance. More each year it becomes exclusively an amusement center."

Where, aside from the classics, one may ask, is this dramatic sustenance of which the good gentleman speaks?

Broadway can not be expected to produce what does not exist, and if the dramatic sustenance is lying around unnoticed, I, for one, would like to learn just where it is lying. If it is around, why, furthermore, doesn't Mr. Hopkins himself produce it? The answer is plain. There is a tragic shortage of worthy dramatic scripts these days, both American and European, and Mr. Hopkins himself well knows it, since he has for some time now bemoaned his inability to find anything to which he might give proud production.

Another thing. What is so dreadful about amusement? I leave the answer to that one to Mr. Hopkins and the reader.

THE MIRACLE OF THE WARSAW GHETTO

OCTOBER 10, 1944

A play by Harry Levick, with incidental music by Sholem Secunda. Produced by Joseph Green and Jacob Ben-Ami for 9 weeks' performances in the New Jewish Folk Theatre.

PROGRAM

LONE MAN	Solomon Krause	ISRAEL	Jacob Ben-Ami
SEXTON	Moishe Belawsky	REB YITZHOK	Menachem Rubin
REB ARYE	Morris Strassberg	YECHIEL	Isidor Casher
LEIBUSH	Isaac Rothblurn	JOSEPH	Michael Goldstein
EISAK	Michael Gibson	WANGURSKY	Abraham Teitelbaum
YIDDEL	Ben-Zion Katz	WANDA	Dina Halpern
COURTYARD EMISSARY		ESTHER	Berta Gersten
	Jacob Mestel	RACHEL	Muriel Gruber
BLACKSMITH	Misha Fishsohn	DAVID	Mark Topel
FRIGHTENED MAN	Max Rosen	VICTOR	Maurice Doner
YOUNG WORKER	Gene Benton	REPRESENTATIVE OF POLISH UNDERGROUND	
COURTYARD EMISSARY	Goldie Lubritzky		Morris Strassberg
GRANNIE GITTA	Dora Weissman		

LAID IN the Warsaw ghetto in the April of 1943, the play has to do with a devout Jew who, returning from Lublin, learns that his family has been annihilated by the Nazis but in whom the ethics of race are so deeply rooted that he protests the vengeance of force. "That is not the eternal Jewish way — with a knife in one's hand," he philosophizes. As doom darkens, however, he slowly comes to understand the true significance of the uprising of his racial brothers and, convinced that he must battle "not only for the Name of God, Kiddush Ha-Shem, but also for the dignity of man and the dignity of his people," goes forth to do his share.

The play, so far as I could gather from the printed synopsis and from the pantomime of the actors, is an overemotionalized melodrama adorned with rituals of the Hebrew faith and, while seemingly stirring to its lay audience, is rather too much in the "In the name of God, do not despair"

spirit, one fears, to satisfy any critic versed in its language and competent thoroughly to understand and appraise it. Some of it, even to one alien to any real comprehension of it, appears to have a certain folk quality and a measure of vitality. But that remains largely guess-work.

Preceding the play on October 7, a bi-lingual show by Isadore Friedman called *Good News* was offered for 205 performances in the Second Avenue Theatre. A mixture of musical comedy and war-background romantic drama, it offered Menasha Skulnik, the pet clown of the Yiddish stage, in stale vaudeville give-and-take with Yetta Zwerling, clad in a wardrobe resembling a riot in a paint factory, and Miriam Kressyn and Max Kletter in a succession of moist love ditties. The chorus and ballet were hardly in the Ziegfeld tradition. I may safely report that much, since eyes are eyes in any language. My animadversions on the stale vaudeville give-and-take are also open to small question, since it was as wholly recognizable in the alien tongue as it long has been in the English. And the same holds for the songs with their accompanying profuse sentimental eye-blinking and the general stage business.

At approximately the same time a musical comedy, *They All Want To Get Married*, with a book by Julie Berns and tunes by Al Olshanetsky, was displayed in the Public Theatre, also very successfully. The cast included Max Wilner, Lucy Gehrman, Aaron Lebedeff, Diana Goldberg, Nina Rochelle, and Irving Grossman. The plot, as obligingly related to the uninitiated by the friendly press agent, "opens with a novelty chorus seeking mates and a dummy bride and groom in a store window coming to life and telling them that marriage isn't all it's said to be. The tale tells of a match-maker who, attempting to escape from would-be brides, hies to the Catskills. The dramatic interlude deals with a refugee, fleeing from Europe after killing a couple of Nazis, who later finds her mother in America." The press agent obliged further by confiding that the story was "very light, yet sincere and often funny," and added that the exhibit "will, I believe, do more to erase racial prejudice than any single medium."

Make up your own minds.

The New Jewish Folk Theatre followed its production of *The Miracle Of The Warsaw Ghetto* with, on December 19, a drama by David Bergelson called *We Will Live*, dealing with "the invasion of a Ukrainian town and the attempt of the Nazi commander to extract the secret of a formula conceived in a Jewish scientist's laboratory." The play was condemned by various reviewers acquainted with its language as "hackneyed," "over-long," and "generally dull." It nevertheless enjoyed a fair run.

MEET A BODY—. OCTOBER 16, 1944

A murder mystery play by Jane Hinton. Produced by H. Clay Blaney for 24 performances in the Forrest Theatre.

PROGRAM

MARGARET MACGREGOR	Ruth McDevitt	NORMAN CLARK	John McQuade
OFFICER MCVEY	John Boyd	HORACE CRAIG	Forrest Orr
JOHN MACGREGOR	Whitford Kane	ELLEN THORNE	Nan Butler
MANNY SIEGELMANN	Al Shean	CARLA THORNE	Helene Ambrose
EVERETT T. GEORGE		DOCTOR HESTER	Dann Malloy
	<i>Le Roi Operti</i>	DETECTIVE SERGEANT COREY	
TIM MACGREGOR	Paul Potter		Harry Gribbon
		THE DANCER	Stephen Morrow

SYNOPSIS: Scene. *The living-room of MacGregor's mortuary on the lower east side of New York.* Act I. Late Saturday afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. One hour later. Scene 2. Shortly before midnight. (Lights will be extinguished during the scene to denote the passing of several minutes.) Act III. Three hours later.

MISS HINTON is a Hollywood literata and her play is a Hollywood movie of the species commonly shown in the Rialto Theatre, where weekly the screen public is regaled with mystery and horror films involving Frankenstein monsters in pursuit of blonde starlets, zombies in pursuit of brunette starlets, murderers in pursuit of red-haired starlets, and escaped lunatics in pursuit of platinum starlets, with in all cases marked-down Ronald Colmans with little mustaches in pursuit of the villains. Nothing is missing for a bad Grade-C picture. The multiple murders, the corpses tumbling out of suddenly opened doors, the eerie green lights, the off-stage playing of "Danse Macabre" on a phonograph record, the shadows on the wall, the sinister poisons, the sword canes, the clutching hands—all these and more are in constant operation. The evening notwithstanding remains rebelliously unmysterious. "Why are you so curious?" blandly inquires one character of another when the third or fourth murder occurs. "I wouldn't be curious if

I weren't a woman," loudly retorts the other, waking up all the women in the audience who had fallen peacefully asleep some time since.

In the *Theatre Book Of The Year, 1942-1943* I observed in reviewing a mystery play called *The Cat Screams*, which turned out to be merely a meow, that the majority of such tocsins with their disappointing last-minute dénouements are like sitting nervously around for two hours waiting for a telephone call from one's best girl and then at long length suddenly hearing the bell ring, jumping up eagerly to answer it, and finding that it is her mother. I also took occasion to point out that the reviewers' adherence to the irrational punctilio imposed upon them by the authors and producers which restrains them from telling the solutions of the mysteries very often assists in swindling the public by concealing the plays' rank lack of imagination and gross silliness. Just why the writers of mystery plays should be granted any such charity above the writers of all other kinds of plays, I could not digest.

I am gratified to note that Edmund Wilson, that very able literary critic, has since got in some extra-good licks. After reading a heap of poor mystery stories he allows that he felt he was unpacking large crates by swallowing the excelsior in order to find at the bottom a few bent and rusty nails. He repeats that the stories in general profit by the aforesaid unfair advantage in the code which forbids the reviewer to give away the secret to the public and hides the pointlessness of many of the stories. "It is not difficult to create suspense by making people await a revelation, but it demands a certain originality to come through with a criminal device which is ingenious or picturesque or amusing enough to make the reader feel the waiting has been worth while," he continues and concludes that the real secret which this or that author had been screening was "a meagreness of imagination of which one only came to realize the full horror when the last chapter had left one blank."

In the case of a good mystery play I am perfectly willing to oblige the author and producer by keeping the play's secret and so adding to the interest of possible audiences.

But in the case of one so thoroughly bad as this of Miss Hinton's, I decline to be a party to the public cheating. Therefore, out with the punctilio, and know ye, should her dud ever be produced anywhere else, that her murders are accomplished, seriatim, by one of Conan Doyle's old *Sign Of The Four* poisoned darts, by Doyle's old instantaneous aconite, by the old Borgia poisoned ring, by the old electrical contrivance, here hidden in a death mask, and by the old escaped lunatic.

However charitable you may happen to be in the other directions, you still surely can't forgive that escaped lunatic.

THE VISITOR. OCTOBER 17, 1944

A "psychological" melodrama by Kenneth White, based on a novel of the same name by Leane Zugsmith and Carl Randau. Produced by Herman Shumlin for 23 performances in the Henry Miller Theatre.

PROGRAM

ELIZABETH	Dorrit Kelton	DAVID CUNNINGHAM
WALTER DAWSON	Ralph Forbes	Walter N. Greaza
JUDITH CUNNINGHAM		MACK BURRELL Thomas Chalmers
	Frances Carson	BUD OWEN Richard Hylton
ELLEN WOOD	Anna Minot	JOE WILLARD Will Hare

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Early evening. Mid-July. Act II. Scene 1. Morning. Five days later. Scene 2. Mid-afternoon. Three days later. Act III. Scene 1. Evening. The following day. Scene 2. An hour and a half later.

The play takes place in the living-room of David Cunningham's house. The time is the present.

T

HE RECORDS SEEM to indicate that there generally has been no surer dramatic box-office device than that of mistaken and puzzling identity. Of the many modern plays in which it has figured, very few have failed to captivate the public. For the most part the plays have taken one of four forms.

In the first, as in such exhibits as *The Servant In The House* and *The Passing Of The Third Floor Back*, a gentle and philanthropic stranger who is mistaken in the earlier portions of the evening for someone like Bernie Baruch turns out, though cautiously not specified in so many words, to be the Saviour. In the second, as in such as *The Lodger* and *At Mrs. Beam's*, an almost equally gentle and solicitous stranger who is guessed to be Frank Crowninshield turns out to be either Jack-the-Ripper or a notorious thief. In the third, as in boons like *The Masquerader* and *In The Fog*, a protean actor is employed to play two different men, one the soul of honor and the other an ignominious bum, who

look exactly alike and who bewilder the spectators no end when the wife's bedroom scene comes around and one of the indeterminable twain makes his entrance into it, eventually betraying his foul identity through wearing a red instead of a pink boutonnière and revealing, as he is about to unbutton his shirt, a missing third finger. And, in the fourth, a variation of the Enoch Arden theme, a man thought to be the one who disappeared from his home and family long years before returns to the scene and gradually arouses the suspicion and doubt of the audience when in the course of the action he seems peculiarly not to remember precisely where all of two decades ago he left his pipe.

Mr. White's play falls into the last named slot, like a lead nickel. For all the traditional sure-fire quality of its general scheme, it takes its place among the several failures, and for reasons that are plain. Asking an audience to believe that a mother even momentarily would have doubts about her young son's identity and regard him as a possible impostor after he had been away from her for only three years hardly leads to even faintly rational and acceptable suspense. And staging any such strainful nonsense as solemnly as if the mother were Medea and the son Hamlet only serves to make the nonsense more nonsensical.

It is customary, of course, in these hand-outs known to the Broadway lingo as psychological melodramas for a director to cause the actors to depict their soul aches by making such faces as are more usually associated with aches rather lower down, to walk fearfully around the stage as if imminently anticipating paralytic strokes, and to speak their lines as if the playwright had left out every other word, which, as I have recorded on certain similar occasions in the past, would be an improvement. Herman Shumlin, the present director, here not only did not vary the pattern but, having seen service in Hollywood, further staged the play as if for a slow-motion film camera, with the actors frequently conveying the impression that they were posing for closeups. Perhaps he was simply bent upon killing two birds with one stone, since the Warner Brothers' company had already bought the motion picture rights to the play

before it opened and since it seemed likely that he might also be offered the direction of the screen version.

This Mr. Shumlin, who several times in the past has proved himself able in the business of stage direction, seems to be on the way toward constituting himself a bobby-sox Stanislavsky. Whatever the nature of the dramatic materials in hand, he appears to be unable to resist visiting upon them a considerable measure of portentously grave Russian shading and pacing them as if they were part and parcel of a memorial service for Dostoievski.

Returning briefly to the play itself, it may be described impressionistically as the kind wherein the mother, a plain, small-town woman, indulges in such *soigné* locutions as "Aren't I?" and wherein she indicates her unquenchable maternal love for her son by ceaselessly pursuing his corpus about the stage with devouring eyes. It may be further described, if additional description be deemed necessary, as the species in which suspense is hoped for by inducing the characters to act and speak exactly opposite to the manner in which they would act and speak if they were rational human beings.

The acting performances under Mr. Shumlin's guiding wand were in line for a curio cabinet. Frances Carson, as the mother, registered her tortured psyche wholly in terms of an unremitting, violent trigeminal neuralgia complicated with a ruptured appendix; Walter Greaza, as the suspicious stepfather, sniffed gloweringly about the stage as if shadowed by a crate of Liederkranz cheese; Ralph Forbes, as the drunken, cadging brother-in-law, performed like Pawnee Bill playing Falstaff; and most of the rest seemed to have confused dramatic character interpretation with a kind of facial Delsarte.

Under the circumstances, the mother might have been forgiven for suspecting her son to be King Lear.

I REMEMBER MAMA. OCTOBER 19, 1944

A stage adaptation by John van Druten of Kathryn Forbes' book, Mama's Bank Account. Produced by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II for a far beyond the season run in the Music Box.

PROGRAM

KATRIN	<i>Joan Tetzel</i>	MR. THORKELSON	<i>Bruno Wick</i>
MAMA	<i>Mady Christians</i>	DR. JOHNSON	<i>William Pringle</i>
PAPA	<i>Richard Bishop</i>	ARNE	<i>Robert Antoine</i>
DAGMAR	<i>Carolyn Hummel</i>	A NURSE	<i>Marie Gale</i>
CHRISTINE	<i>Francis Heflin</i>	ANOTHER NURSE	<i>Dorothy Elder</i>
NELS	<i>Marlon Brando</i>	SODA CLERK	<i>Frank Babcock</i>
MR. HYDE	<i>Oswald Marshall</i>	MADELINE	<i>Cora Smith</i>
AUNT TRINA	<i>Adrienne Gessner</i>	DOROTHY SCHILLER	<i>Ottilie Kruger</i>
AUNT SIGRID	<i>Ellen Maher</i>	FLORENCE DANA	<i>Moorehead</i>
AUNT JENNY	<i>Ruth Gates</i>		<i>Josephine Brown</i>
UNCLE CHRIS	<i>Oscar Homolka</i>	BELLBOY	<i>Herbert Kenwith</i>
A WOMAN	<i>Louise Lorimer</i>		

The action passes in and around San Francisco some years ago.

P

ROFESSORIAL criticism would be horrified by the play, which to its strict mind is hardly a play at all and which violates most of the rules and regulations in the class-room books. It has no plot; its action is static; its dramaturgy, such as it is, is lacking in steady progression; it offers no conflict, no crises, no climaxes; it is, in short, merely a series of sketches loosely gathered together and more in the line of a family picture album than drama. But, like several other things frowned upon by the ipsojures, it confounds their wisdom by turning out to be not only in large part an intelligently enjoyable theatrical evening but a striking popular success. And this for all the fact that even the less professorial and more catholic criticism may also readily find plenty the matter with it.

This latter criticism, speaking as one of its merchants, finds me wishing, for example, that the playwright might.

have refrained from incorporating into his play a narrator in the form of a young daughter of the Norwegian-American household whom he seats to one side of the stage and bathes in a spotlight's glow and whose periodic contribution to the proceedings consists in introducing the various episodes with lines like "I well remember how Mama, etc.,," "Then, one day, Papa and Mama, etc.," and "I still can't forget the time Uncle Chris, etc." The device is not only altogether too worn with theatrical wear but, more to the point, is here entirely unnecessary, since it detracts from rather than adds to the story's movement. It further betrays the playwright as one perhaps commercially dubious about the play's turn of the century period and intent upon giving it at least a small, safe measure of contemporary flavor by constituting his narrator, initially in the current dress, a tie between the past and present. Moreover, when he keeps his narrator quite as young as she was during the much earlier period of the exhibit his device seems all the more hollow, and when he makes her the later biographer of her family and introduces such a routine literary homily as, in effect, "A person shouldn't try to write of things he doesn't actually know about but, if he would be successful, only about what he actually knows and has experienced" — when he conducts himself in such wise he lays himself open not only to professorial but to any other kind of criticism.

There is also the matter of his use of so-called fadeouts, or short episodes played on small revolving platforms at either side of the stage, which often have about them the air of cinema flashbacks. The narrator business is only one of these. There is always something about the use of such fadeouts and flashbacks that implies a playwright is not as competent in the dramaturgical craft as he should be. The best dramatists, past and present, have hardly had need of them; they have been able to incorporate their essence directly into their dramatic fabrics. While on this occasion they have been manipulated with mechanical smoothness and hence are not as disturbing as they usually are, they nevertheless take their place in critical disfavor.

The flashback as we all too often get it is, even on purely

theatrical grounds, far from satisfactory and generally a little ridiculous. We observe a character wrinkledly ruminating that he or she recalls a night twenty or more years ago and then wait patiently for several blank minutes while the stagehands noisily shift the scene (even slide or revolving stages sometimes have a way of not sliding or revolving as velvety as they should) and presently behold a number of actors trying to regain their balance on the slowly settling platforms and go ahead with their lines. The effect is less the convincing flowing of one period into another than of a sardonic contest between the actors and scene shifters, and the more important consequence is a violation of the mood which the playwright has sought to establish in his audience. Even when handled as adroitly as in the present case, the business seems intermittently to be unnecessarily distracting and it is only by virtue of that dexterous handling that the audience is halfway persuaded to suspend critical judgment and swallow the rigmarole.

The impression which the play, above such considerations, makes is wrought by Mr. van Druten's honest simplicity, his avoidance of any slightest strain to give his innocent dramatic materials more importance than they possess, his similar avoidance of extrinsic humors, and his uncommon talent in casting and stage direction. There is no better man in these respects in our theatre, as he proved sufficiently in the instance of his last year's *The Voice Of The Turtle*. Episode after episode in the life of the Norwegian-American family is dramatically manipulated in its own artless terms and never once is there resort to an overemphasis which would play havoc with its simple internals. The result amounts to an easy turning of the pages in the family's album which presents more tellingly than any repeated showy moistening of a playwright's thumb the panorama of all those big and little comedies and tragedies that go to make up the life of a household.

The settings by George Jenkins are first-rate and the acting company, notably Oscar Homolka as the spuriously gruff old uncle with a bottle in one hand and a mistress in the other, is for the greater part endorsable.

A final note slightly apart. The performances as in other theatres were prefaced, as customary, by the playing of "The Star Spangled Banner." Not only is little more discouraging to the proper patriotic spirit than the national anthem as rendered by three-fourths of these theatre orchestras but little is more positively discouraging to any anticipatory theatre mood. In the case of the larger orchestras in the musical show houses, things are not so bad. But when it comes to the smaller ones, usually quartettes, in the dramatic theatres, the stimulation provided is approximately equal to that of "Rock-a-bye Baby." Standing up to the national anthem ventilated by the average quartette composed of a piano that apparently has not been tuned since the heyday of Mayme Gehrue, a squealy violin, a hock-shop 'cello and a clarinet or, God wot, an accordion is hardly likely to inflame the standee, albeit a direct descendant of half a dozen of the Founding Fathers, with a great pride of country so much as with a feeling that it will be swell to sit down again and go to sleep. This feeling overwhelms him in particular when the union gets to the slow movement, which is usually interpreted in the lugubrious tempo of "Japanese Sandman" as dispensed by a female crooner giving out in a military hospital ward. What is needed to make the anthem what it should be are some good loud brasses and, certainly, at least one good loud drum. As a public-spirited theatregoer, I herewith offer to supply such a drum to any house manager who alleges that he can not afford the extra expense. What is more, I promise to get Major de Seversky, the long-distance bomber, to sit in the pit and at the proper moment give it the works.

VIOLET. OCTOBER 24, 1944

A comedy by Whitfield Cook, based on his series of popular magazine stories. Produced by Albert Margolies for 23 performances in the Belasco Theatre.

PROGRAM

CLARENCE	<i>John Cherry</i>	SIDNEY WATROUS	<i>Carlo Robinson</i>
PETE GRANDEN	<i>Harvey Stephens</i>	WALTER MEEKER	<i>Mason Adams</i>
MRS. ELFIE TUNISON		CRYSTAL	<i>Fay Baker</i>
	<i>Doro Merande</i>	CHARLOTTE WATROUS	<i>Joan Vitez</i>
ELISHA BLY	<i>Len Hollister</i>	HENRY WATROUS	<i>Leslie Litomy</i>
LILY FOSTER	<i>Helen Claire</i>	W. W. UPTHEGROVE	<i>Russell Gaige</i>
ESTHER	<i>Paula Trueman</i>		
BRUCE	<i>Billy Nevard</i>		
VIOLET } Batch 1	<i>Pat Hitchcock</i>		
EVELYN }	<i>Fuzzy McQuade</i>		
ARTHUR }	<i>Martin David</i>		
SUSIE	<i>Jimsey Somers</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Late evening, December 31st. Act II. Noon the next day. Act III. Morning two days later.

The action takes place in the living-room of Pete Granden's remodeled farmhouse in Vermont.

LIKE THE PLAYS dealing with mistaken and puzzling identity (*vide The Visitor*), the plays dealing with adolescents also fall roughly into four catalogues. In the first, as in exhibits like Wedekind's *Awakening Of Spring* and Schön-herr's *The Children's Tragedy*, the adolescents are viewed sombrely as being either beset by an incipient and baleful sex urge or doomed to misery by the acts of their parents, with suicide in one case or the other occasionally the only way out. In the second, as in Hauptmann's *Hannele* and the sort, they are treated to the gentle embroideries of fantasy and are frequently bequeathed scenes in which, during a serious illness, they entertain visions of one kind or another (customarily given stage interpretation in terms of considerable gilt tinsel and fancy lighting effects) wherein they

see themselves either in Heaven or its equivalent in some such shape as an enormous candy store with barrels of sweets theirs for the asking.

In the third, as in O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!* and van Druten's *Young Woodley*, they are provided with a comedy treatment and either have adventures with loose girls in back rooms of saloons or in juke joints (involving their first heroic attempts at alcoholic liquor and smoking tobacco) or wistfully fall in love with women (usually experienced in the ways of the world or school-teachers) who are considerably older than themselves and hence embarrassed by their calf-like overtures. In this third group, too, are the lesser specimens like *Junior Miss*, *Janie*, and *Kiss And Tell* which resort to the device of making the adult characters act more or less like adolescents and the adolescents more or less like adults, thus guaranteeing the gratification of the youthful matinée trade and no less the manifold older souls in the nocturnal audiences who flatter themselves that the authors are only fooling, for comedy purposes. And in the fourth, as in *Brother Rat* and *What A Life!*, the youngsters are farcically presented as so many white Topsys, male and female, who comport themselves for the most part as if they were the progeny of Harry Thaw and Charley's Aunt.

Violet is one of the very worst of these diaper dramas. Its general classification comes under the comedies which give to the leading brat all the sagacity that the older characters lack. It is so wretchedly written, however, that even children who might otherwise be tickled by the idea would be exhausted by the supreme dulness of its execution.

Telling basically the same story as F. Hugh Herbert's *For Keeps* (*q.v.*), Mr. Cook's play only makes suffering worse by introducing five obstreperous children instead of one and again causing their leader, whilst the others are messing about the stage, to go through the old motions of untangling her much-marrying father's love life in order finally to find a comfortable home for herself. Sample humors concern a speculation as to whether a painting of trees represents a boat, a hypothetical teetotaler who shows up drunk, a brat's lordly appearance in one of her mother's

elaborate evening gowns, impromptu excursions on the part of the youngsters to the bathroom and, last but not least, a romantic heroine who indulges in such starlit locutions as "Get it off your chest." In the drama, save when ably written, as in life, one child may be amusing, two tolerable, but three or more in congress assembled, as in this case, enough to drive one to the bottle.

The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film company was responsible for this particular spit into the theatre's face. It financed the play with a deposit of 100,000 dollars to apply against a maximum of 250,000, the difference to come from weekly payments based on a percentage of the box-office receipts. Since the exhibit was unanimously denounced as rubbish by the reviewers and played to no audiences and a heavy loss, the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film company got nothing for its investment except possibly a movie that will be proclaimed an epic and make a million or more dollars.

SNAFU. OCTOBER 25, 1944

A farce-comedy by Louis Solomon and Harold Buchman. Produced by George Abbott for 157 performances, initially in the Hudson Theatre.

PROGRAM

JOSEPHINA	Eugenia Delarova	2ND LEGIONNAIRE	Ernest Rowan
MADGE STEVENS	Elspeth Eric	3RD LEGIONNAIRE	Stephen Gierasch
LAURA JESSUP	Patricia Kirkland		
BEN STEVENS	Russell Hardie	RONALD STEVENS	Billy Redfield
MR. TAYLOR	John Souther	PFC. DANNY BAKER	Dort Clark
KATE HEREFORD	Bethel Leslie	MRS. GARRETT	Ann Dere
AUNT EMILY	Enid Markey	DETECTIVE	Cliff Dunstan
SENATOR PHIL FORD	Ralph W. Chambers	MARTHA	Eve McVeagh
1ST LEGIONNAIRE	Edwin Cooper	COL. WEST	Winfield Smith

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. About noon, of an inevitably sunny day in spring. Scene 2. The next morning, about 5:30. Act II. The following day — late morning. Act III. Several hours later.

The entire action of the play takes place in the living-room of the Stevens home in southern California.

LIKE BOTH the plays about mistaken identity and adolescents, the later-day plays dealing with soldiers similarly for the major part register themselves under four headings. In the first, the soldiers are presented as young men full of idealism and Bartlett poetry quotations who meet their ends on the field of battle, with their mothers and sweethearts back home pausing only long enough in their pursuit of the household culinary arts stoically to observe that man's noblest duty is self-sacrifice that the world may live forevermore in tranquillity, good will and peace. In the second, they are constituted ghosts who, visible only to their mothers, return from the grave and persuade everyone but their uncles who have made millions out of the munitions business that wars are futile and that, if the future happiness of mankind is to be preserved, nations should content

themselves, if they feel the need of letting off steam, in playing cowboys-and-Indians in the back yard.

In the third, the soldiers are vouchsafed a comedy treatment which in turn takes three forms. First, we have them jovially boozing and wenching whilst the property man in the wings works himself into a lather making loud sounds indicative of a war going on, the soldiers meanwhile working themselves into an even greater lather in trying to drown out the sounds with louder cuss words and jocund slaps on one another's pantaloons. Secondly, we have them home either honorably discharged or invalidated out of the service or on furlough and endeavoring to readjust themselves to their wives, who have become independent in their absence or perhaps amorously interested in someone else, usually depicted as a loafer, or to their old surroundings, which seem humdrum after the experiences they have gone through: And, thirdly, we have them on leave and passing their holiday either in light sexual diversions which are subsequently moralized into holy matrimony or in light sexual diversions which aren't.

In the fourth, the boys are given the farcical treatment and either wake up the next morning with a severe hang-over in strange beds adjacent to those occupied by wide-eyed cuties, who professedly are scared out of their wits, or spend all the time they can spare from their families in dancing jig steps upon the sight of the gluteal prominence of a shapely female and exclaiming "Oh, boy!"

The Messrs. Solomon's and Buchman's *Snafu* is a combination of the honorably discharged soldier who tries to re-adapt himself to the old surroundings and the soldier who dances the amatory jig steps whenever a personable young woman crosses the scene. And naturally added to the combination for extra measure, since George Abbott had a hand in the fabrication, are not only such before-mentioned slices of the short pants drama as constitute adolescents the intellectual superiors of their parents and the latter the inferiors of the adolescents but also the suggestion that the youngsters are not the parents' offspring but rather those of Wild Bill Hickok and Babe Didrickson. Further stirred

into the chowder are the business of mistaken identity, the scene in which a parent begins apprehensively to give his offspring some esoteric advice and presently finds the latter giving it to him (recognizable from S. N. Behrman's *The Talley Method, et al.*), the comical servant girl, the dumb detective, the pompous Senator, and other such strips of theatrical bacon.

Out of the familiar and long over-worked materials the authors, materially aided by Mr. Abbott, have, however, managed a farce-comedy periodically not without some amusement. It takes much too long to get into motion and the third act up to within ten minutes of the final curtain slows down considerably, but in between there are funny moments.

The play brought to twelve the number of exhibits thus far in the season that have included characters in uniform. It also brought to twelve the number of reviewers' complaints about authors and directors who permit the use of somewhat over-active telephones. While I agree that over-active telephones may be depressing from the audience point of view, I doubt whether any reviewer or other person with the slightest experience of the cursed instrument may legitimately complain that from a dramatic point of view their ardor is not entirely within the realistic fact and critically legitimate.

The title of the play stems, in the definition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* quoted in the program, from military slang and means "in a mess, haywire, and derives from the first letters of the words 'situation normal all fouled up.'" The eminent *Encyclopædia Britannica* should be taken gently in hand and told about the birds and the flowers. The first letter of the fourth word may be all right, but the word itself, as any soldier may inform it, is hardly "fouled."

THE PERFECT MARRIAGE

OCTOBER 26, 1944

A play by Samson Raphaelson. Produced by Cheryl Crawford for 92 performances in the Ethel Barrymore Theatre.

PROGRAM

ROSA	Evelyn Davis	ADDISON MANNING	James Todd
DALE WILLIAMS	Victor Jory	GLORIA ENDICOTT	Martha Sleeper
JENNY WILLIAMS	Miriam Hopkins	HELEN WILLIAMS	
MABEL MANNING	Helen Flint		Joyce Van Patten

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *A Saturday evening in early October, about 10:30.* Scene 2. *Ten minutes later.* Act II. Scene 1. *The next morning, about noon.* Scene 2. *Five o'clock in the afternoon, the same day.* Act III. *That evening, 10:30.*

The entire play is set in the upstairs sitting-room and bedroom of the home of Mr. and Mrs. Dale Williams in New York City.

F

OR MORE THAN half a century French playwrights, and occasionally Italians like Bracco and Austrians like Schnitzler, have been writing about the sexual coolness that often develops after years of otherwise happy marriage. To enumerate the plays in which the idea has figured, beginning with Sardou and not ending with the Bernstein of *The Thief*, would fill pages. Various playwrights of other nations, including our own as in the instance of Vincent Lawrence, have also considered the theme, which in all cases is customarily resolved either in a satisfactory reunion through the agency of jealousy, peek-a-boo lingerie, or champagne and epigrams, or, if the vein be more solemn, in a decision of the mates thereafter to go their separate ways. Any number of the plays, when handled in terms of comedy, have been amusing and several of the more serious nature have amounted to sound drama.

Not so, however, with Mr. Raphaelson's tardy effort, a hybrid of comedy and drama, and equally bad on both counts. Devoid of wit and avid of every stereotype imag-

inable, it reduces the theme to a mere endlessly wordy skirmish between a couple of suspiciously impotent alley cats. Neither his husband nor wife, who have been married for ten years and have a sizeable daughter, are redeemed by the faintest suggestion of charm or intelligence and their anatomical disputation accordingly take on the flavor of a debate between two authors of such tomes as *Secrets Of Sex In Marriage*, with the four-letter words hesitantly left out. The result is, I suppose, what passes for a clean and moral play, but it remains an essentially dirty and disgusting one.

When Mr. Raphaelson's pair of characters are not getting into fancy boudoir habiliments in the hope of stimulating each other's libidos and vainly horsing around on a bed, situated conspicuously throughout the evening at stage right, they are propounding their author's theories of sex and matrimony, all venerable with age and periodically taking such matinée contours as "After two people have been in love and then one day they decide to settle for friendship — that's a bad day." And at such widely separated moments as they are spared from shouting their glandular philosophies at each other they are given the stage business of pretending to search for matches whereabouts to light their cigarettes, presumably indicative of their need for a few minutes' profound reflection. The net impression is of a phonograph on a bed screeching over and over again a single scene from a play written by Mae West at the age of twelve.

One of Mr. Raphaelson's troubles, hinted at in certain of his past efforts, is his apparent conviction that he is something of a savant in matters pertaining to the amatory arts and sciences. What he is, rather, is simply a writer for the stage who unknowingly repeats the most hackneyed observations of countless playwrights before him, and repeats even those that once may have had some humor with a perfectly straight and very grave face. And his writing still further betrays his posturing worldliness in such bus-boy locutions as "We'll tell them we've got a nice cold bottle of champagne on ice", in such stale greasepaint beliefs as the superior efficacy of a violent quarrel in bringing two

lovers together again, and in such meditations as have to do with the sexual desirability of young girls as against old women of thirty.

Both the casting of the leading roles and Mr. Raphaelson's stage direction were lamentable. If, in place of Miss Hopkins and Mr. Jory, players somewhat gifted in smooth comedy had been hired, the play, for all its inner leaden quality, might at least superficially have seemed less leaden than it did. Miss Hopkins purveyed in the main only poor imitations of Tallulah Bankhead and Gertrude Lawrence when she was not exploding dramatically in Hollywood fashion, and Mr. Jory rested his histrionic art largely in grim frowns when erect and in dejecting his head and allowing the audience to admire his oiled black curly hair when seated.

As for the staging, in a pamphlet dealing with the history of theatrical entertainment in Seattle and published by the University of Washington I find, among others, these reflections on acting and direction quoted from an article by the critic for *Every Sunday* of Tacoma and dated December 26, 1891:

"When a child actress has something particular to confide to her papa or mamma, it would be the height of ill manners did she not crouch down on the floor by the side of her parent."

"When an actor enters into confidential conversation with another actor, it is the proper thing for him to hang his leg over the back of a chair (or couch), with his foot resting on its seat."

² Since the same devices were visible under Mr. Raphaelson's direction, it becomes evident that either the stage of Tacoma, for all the irony of the critic quoted, was fifty-three years ahead of its time or Mr. Raphaelson's stage is fifty-three years behind its.

NO WAY OUT. OCTOBER 30, 1944

A play by Owen Davis. Produced by Robert Keith for 8 performances in the Cort Theatre.

PROGRAM

CORA HILLIARD	Viola Frayne	DR. WALTER LEVENSELLER
DR. ENID KARLEY	Irene Hervey	Donald Foster
BOB KARLEY	Jerome P. Thor	HESTER DARROW Jean Casto
BARBARA TRENT	Nancy Marquand	DR. NILES HILLIARD Robert Keith
NAPOLEON	John Marriott	JIM SLADE Maurice Burke
MOLLY LEVENSELLER	Viola Roache	

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A September afternoon. Act II. The day following. Act III. That night.

The Scene. The living-room of "the old Trent mansion" in a large city in northern New York.

MR. DAVIS, who is now in his seventies, has written more than three hundred plays, the great majority of them utterly worthless. This latest is no exception. Treating of medical ethics which in the case of an unscrupulous physician may conceivably be utilized to criminal ends, the exhibit, which attempts to conceal its superficiality in the stridors of melodrama, is of the species that in the early years of the present century was known as a problem play. As in most such problem plays of that period the chief problem is largely the playwright's and consists in his painstaking effort to avoid its more or less obvious and simple solution until a few minutes before the final curtain is due to fall.

The pseudo-problem in the instance of this particular specimen proceeds from a plot involving the aforesaid knavish medico and a step-daughter who stands in the way of his acquiring his wife's fortune. The step-daughter, a victim of Addison's disease, is mortally ill and, though he knows the nature of her ailment, the medico works for her death

through a deliberately false diagnosis. A woman doctor, who is a visitor in the house, privately diagnoses the girl's true condition and, her suspicions of the medico aroused by an old Negro retainer of the family who informs her that the latter had got rid of his wife's first husband through a similar villainy, demands that she be brought into consultation. The medico refuses and the woman doctor can do nothing under the circumstances because of professional ethics.

For two long hours the theme is assiduously belabored by the playwright with the gratuitous philosophical despair of a blacksmith striking an anvil with a lollipop, all under the apparent impression that the problem involved will stimulate an audience with its perplexity. Unfortunately for the playwright, however, it doesn't, since the audience, long used to the dramatic subterfuge of arbitrary deferment of a transparent solution, simply wonders before the play is half through why the woman doctor does not solve her difficulty very readily by persuading the faithful Negro retainer, who is close to the step-daughter, to tell her what her scoundrelly step-father is up to.

The play, in short, is much the kind of bogus profundity that might have been concocted by Augustus Thomas or some young local admirer of Eugene Brieux thirty-five years ago. What it essentially is, in the more immediate description, is a seedy Owen Davis paraphrase of Rose Franken's seedy *Doctors Disagree* of the previous season, which was in turn a poor Rose Franken paraphrase of Rachel Crothers' seedy *A Man's World* and Dorothy Brandon's hardly less seedy *The Outsider*.

It begins to look as if the possible mark of an inferior playwright is to be found in his recourse to a Negro character in Caucasian surroundings as the symbol of uprightness and decency. In Herbert Kibbly's *Men To The Sea* a Negro and his wife were presented as the only really pure characters among a group of sexually miscellaneous whites. In Samson Raphaelson's *The Perfect Marriage* a Negress was guaranteed to be the only decently minded character in a group of vulgar-minded whites. In Edward Chodorov's

last season's *Decision* a Negro and Negress were offered as relative paragons in a white group composed in considerable part of rats. And in this *No Way Out* the Negro retainer is one of the two characters amidst all the whites who has any visible intelligence and concept of honor.

EMBEZZLED HEAVEN. OCTOBER 31, 1944

A play by Ladislaus Bush-Fekete and Mary Helen Fay, derived from the novel by Franz Werfel. Produced by the Theatre Guild for 52 performances in the National Theatre.

PROGRAM

TETA	Ethel Barrymore	MOJMIR	Eduard Franz
BICHLER	Sanford Meisner	MASHA	Sheila Trent
COUNTESS ARGAN	Bettina Cerf	SOTTOMAESTRO	Marcel Dill
MOJMIR (THE CHILD)	Edward Fernandez	KOMPERT	Harry Neville
MILA	Wauna Paul	MONSIGNORE	John McKee
ZDENKA	Madeline Lee	POPE	Albert Basserman
GEORGE	Val Witherill	MAESTRO DI CAMERA	Edward Kilcullen
JARMILA	Peggy Meredith	PAPAL VALET	Julian Benjamin
FRANZISKA	Augusta Roeland	SWISS GUARDS	<i>Paige Edwards, Robert Fletcher</i>
MAIL CARRIER	Don Valentine	SEDIARIS	<i>David Barnaby, Robert O'Brien</i>
MRS. SCHULTZ	Else Basserman	PHYSICIAN	Graham Velsey
PASTOR	Martin Blaine	<i>Pilgrims, Papal Retinue</i>	
KOVASKY	Frank Richards		
PROSSNITZER	Wolfe Barzell		

SYNOPSIS: Prologue. Teta's room. *The Argan Castle, near Prague, 1913.* Act I. *The kitchen, Argan Castle, 1938.* Act II. *The church garden, Detva, Moravia. The next day.* Act III. *Reception hall. The Vatican. A few weeks later.*

WITH MOST of the romantic figures of our theatre gone to their Maker and with our contemporary stage so largely bare of players who have about them the old brilliant air, it is always at least a sentimental satisfaction when Ethel Barrymore reappears on the scene. For she retains that quality of person, whatever the merit of her vehicles, which singles her out from a current parade constituted in considerable part of actresses, however talented, for whom no connoisseur horse of other days would have abandoned his carriage in favor of undiscriminating admirers.

This latest vehicle of Miss Barrymore's, however, needs not a horse but a sizeable cavalry to lend it any movement. Alleged to be a dramatization of the Werfel novel about a poor Czech woman's attempt to bribe her way after life into God's grace through the praying offices of a nephew whom she supports on the way to the priesthood only to find that he has used her funds to other ends, it is nothing of the kind, for no play emerges. What it is, rather, is merely a succession of dramaless episodes, heavily repetitious, snipped out of the novel with a sickle and placed upon a stage. Only a section of its last act has the faintest trace of theatrical life, and that life proceeds less from any drama than from the pictorial quality of the Vatican setting and costumes. For the rest, the evening consists chiefly in the spectacle of Miss Barrymore seated in a chair or lounging at one side of the stage and ruminating on her chances eventually of getting into Heaven. She sits beautifully and she lounges gracefully and she ruminates artfully with that melodious voice of hers, but that, unless I am seriously mistaken, hardly constitutes a play.

The language in which the quasi-play is couched is furthermore for the most part surprisingly commonplace, does not suggest the hitherto gifted Werfel save at widely spaced intervals, and draws the exhibit in with a check-rein rather than releases it. It is to be submitted that, Werfel or not, such old Stanley J. Weyman lingo as, for example, "You tried to buy a mediator with earthly coin — and you failed; now you have the purchase price: love!" is scarcely conducive to the inoculation of the more sensitive auditor with any great exaltation of the spirit. It is only in the noted last act that any slightest sense of the spiritual stimulation vital to the prosperity of the theme creeps into the proceedings, and it creeps into them less for what is spoken than for what the eye sees. There is something about the spectacle of a Pope of Rome on the stage that arbitrarily exercises an impressive effect upon an audience whatever the value of a play, and it here exercised it again for all the circumstance that the actor chosen for the role, Basserman, had a thick,

beery Teutonic accent worthy of an old North German Lloyd smoking-room steward.

Iden Payne's direction of the play, save in the final act; gave the production the aspect of having taken a sleeping pill. His materials, true enough, challenged him with their lifelessness but even so his manipulation of the stage doubled their lethargy. On such occasions as he was desperately determined to inject a little vitality into the exhibit at any cost he furthermore committed the mistake of confusing a bogus acting effervescence with dynamic character interpretation, with the result that two of the play's characters, the gardener turned footman and the swindler nephew, conducted themselves almost exactly alike and gave the effect of the two Dromios having wandered out of *The Comedy Of Errors* and finding themselves in Czechoslovakia.

We return to Miss Barrymore and to the place which she, with a few others, occupies in the fancy of theatre audiences.

In Hollywood, what is known as a glamour girl is uniformly a chick of tender years. Talent generally plays no, or at best very small, part in the quality attributed to her. The glamour consists mainly in a press agent's imagination, which various hired hands around the studio set about converting into an approximation to reality.

This approximation is maneuvered in devious ways, behind all of them the press agent master-mind and entrepreneur. First, a dentist goes to work on the girl, very often one whose sole assets are youth, a good figure, and a ferocious ambition some day to achieve the high artistic eminence of a ringside seat at a recherché Hollywood night club, and converts the little one's teeth, which may resemble the stubs in a November corn field, into so many unbelievably symmetrical pearls. Secondly, a hair-doer is drafted to exercise his virtuosity on the little one's locks and, whatever they be like, forthwith to change them. Only in the rarest instances is their color sacred. If black, they must be altered to yellow; if yellow, to black; if brown to

red; if red to something else. Too, they must be arranged in a coiffure that mama back home in Texas or jail would never recognize and, if she did, would faint. Thirdly, if the little one's figure is not exactly what it should be, a physical culture expert is summoned to pummel and roll the little one out of what lumps and bumps are in the malapropos places.

Next comes the makeup professor who goes to work on the little one's face. The erstwhile thick eyebrows are shaved into the contours of slender crescent moons. False eyelashes, in some cases approximating Gauguin's paint brushes, are glued to the patient's lids, lending her the appearance of a whiskbroom wistfully enamoured of itself. An exotic compound of belladonna and possibly crème de cacao is dropped into her eyes to lend them a beam and glisten that would frighten the average seacoast lighthouse out of its wits. And miladi's face itself is shellacked, powdered, pencilled and painted into a spectacle so different from what it originally was that aghast mama, fainting after a look at the coiffure, upon squinting it falls into a mortal coma.

The metamorphosed little one is now ready for the courrier, and presently emerges from the atelier looking like what the third assistant press agent who gets sixty dollars a week raptly calls a million dollars.

Our beauty is thereupon placed in the hands of a photographer. This genius, manipulating countless lights, draperies, screens and gauzes and adjusting our beauty in a series of poses and postures calculated best to reveal the puissant splendors of her bosoms and limbs, confects views of her theoretically capable of sending normal men into spasms of ecstasy. And then at length re-enters upon the scene the master press agent.

That worthy now gets busy with a vengeance. The pictures are dispatched far and wide to work their subtle will upon the movie public. Stories relating the heart-breaking powers of the beauty, the manifold heroes of the screen who have succumbed to her devastating allure, and the scions of wealth and high society who have cast themselves

into the Gowanus Canal in despair of achieving her hand in marriage enrich the film magazines and Sunday newspaper supplements. Photographs of the paragon arriving orchid-laden at the LaGuardia airport or Grand Central station, or both simultaneously, further embellish the prints. And other pictures showing our heroine in an invisible swim suit beside her visible private two-hundred-by-four-hundred pool, with her seven Russian wolf hounds, in her modest little 20,000 dollar flower garden, and in her simple little bed that looks like a combination of Billy Rose's *Diamond Horseshoe* and the late Everleigh Club vie with the news at breakfast, lunch and dinner tables throughout the countryside. And another Hollywood glamour girl has been born — and made.

There are, as you need not be re-informed, scores of such synthetic wonderbabies in the film capital, and almost all of them are much of a youthful piece. How do they compare with the glamour girls of Broadway and the theatre?

These glamour girls of Broadway are, to put it mildly, a somewhat different sort. Far from being if not exactly wet, still slightly moist behind the ears, only one of the five authentic glamourousæ of today's stage is still in her thirties and the others, three of them, are in their forties, and the fifth actually in her sixties. When it is recorded that these women achieve in the world of the theatre the romantic response achieved in the world of the movies by the cuties aforesaid, it is the established fact and not, as some may sardonically elect to believe, mere senescent sentimental nonsense or a commentator's strain to put an arbitrarily different slant on the matter. For the impersonal truth is that at the present time there is not a single young actress in the theatre — and there are a number of them who are remarkably pretty, charming and animating — who is publicly accepted as being as romantically inveigling as any of the five women alluded to and who, with the one exception noted, are old enough to be the girls' mothers.

Who are these five?

First, there is Katharine Hepburn, the youngest of the lot, who is thirty-eight. Second, there are Gertrude Law,

rence, who is forty-seven; Katharine Cornell, who is also forty-seven; and Tallulah Bankhead, who is forty-three. And, finally, there is the perennial Miss Barrymore, who proudly confesses to being all of sixty-six. Of this quintette only Miss Hepburn approaches even remotely to the Hollywood concept of glamour and its concomitant, sex appeal. And even she, who has been in pictures, sometime since surrendered her glamour standing in Hollywood to such very much younger items as Veronica Lake, Rita Hayworth, Lauren Bacall, and the like. Furthermore, in the sheer matter of looks, as looks are popularly regarded, she alone of the quintette satisfies the popular sentimental, pictorial demand. Yet the other four exercise an invocation not only equal to hers, but here and there immeasurably superior.

None of these women, Hepburn included, has gone through a beauty mill. All of them are more or less as nature originally fashioned them. Perhaps, in some cases, the hair has been touched up a little; perhaps a tooth has here and there been prettied up a bit; but no Hollywood brand of metamorphosis has been visited upon any of them. It is not, moreover, as it is in England, any arbitrary loyalty to favorite actresses on the part of the theatre public that accounts for that public's romantic esteem. When these actresses have appeared in bad plays their public in two cases out of three has remained away. Nor is it, in some cases, a matter of loftier talent. Judith Anderson, to name but one, has a talent far exceeding that of several of them, and so, to name but another, has Helen Hayes. But neither of these and none of the gifted rest has exactly the species of peculiar personal appeal that the five in question have.

It has not been expert press-agentry, or fancy photography, or swimming pools and Russian wolf hounds, or canta-loupe sweaters, or views of delirious silken boudoirs, or even always shrewdly chosen vehicles that have made these actresses what they are in the public's imagination. Nor, surely, has it been the tantalizing species of corporeal embellishment that Hollywood relies upon. Hepburn in her careless slacks, Bankhead in her two-year-old velvet gowns, Lawrence in her humdrum street outfits, Cornell in her

chill tailor-mades, and Barrymore usually dressed as if clothes were the last thing in the world to interest her — certainly there is nothing in this quarter to make men or women turn around on the street to look. It is, rather, that these women as individuals seem to have something in them, whatever it is, that catches and holds the theatre public's personal fancy as no five or ten or fifty Hollywood blossoms could conceivably hope to.

The quality which is the personality of Ethel Barrymore has persisted for all of forty-odd theatrical years. In her youthful day the belle of New York, with more avid swains in pursuit than one could crowd into the Brown Derby, she has come through the changes of the long years with the loss of little more than that dark, slim young beauty which brooded from photographs on end tacked to college boys' walls in the early Nineties. The voice that crawled into the heart of a nation, that voice with the sound of a blues song addressed to a muffled drum, hasn't changed, nor has the gentleness of stage person, nor have the unstudiedly graceful gestures, nor has that physical suggestion of being always half-absent.

Katharine Cornell, who in her earliest theatrical appearances vaguely suggested the Katharine Hepburn who was yet to come, is now, in her late forties, a woman of sable dignity, of impressive reserve, of implied intelligence, and with a voice that, while it has only a measure of the cajolery of Miss Barrymore's, deftly combines Béchamel sauce with Worcestershire and is dramatically palatable.

Tallulah Bankhead is no more like either of these than the late lamented Jeanne Eagels was like Elita Proctor Otis. Tallulah, whose Dixie looks might easily be mistaken for English, is the archebiotic, the to-hell-with-you-and-you sort, who drives at one like a brakeless tally-ho and whose voice always suggests that she has smoked seventy cigarettes too many. Her mouth seems ever poised to put the bouncer in his place. Her flowing hair she tosses to and fro about her head as if it were an irksome basketball. Her appearance she doesn't give a hoot about. The take-it-or-leave-it type, she may come in for the moment like a lamb, but she

stays and goes out like a circus lion. She is a nitroglycerine sandwich, three-decker with mustard.

Gertrude Lawrence came to America first from her native England as a singing and dancing girl in a *Charlot* revue. Her figure is still as slender and full of grace as it was then; her spirit is quite as lively — on occasion even disturbingly livelier; and the only thing about her that has materially changed is her talent, which has developed so astonishingly that she is perhaps the most versatile actress on the contemporary American stage. She can play a dramatic scene forcefully; she can sing a song drolly; she can dance and shake a naughty hip with the best of them; she can do, it would seem, pretty nearly everything. She isn't beautiful; she isn't the kind movie magazines spread in six-color grandeur on their covers; she would never get an Oscar for being the most popular girl in Hollywood; and Cesar Romero probably never heard of her. But she, like the others named, is one of the theatre's own real glamour girls.

In short and in general, when a beautiful young screen actress ages there are only two roads open to her: either retirement, forced or voluntary, or more or less low-comedy roles which are insulting to her persistent adorable picture of herself. When, on the other hand, a beautiful young stage actress grows older, the loss of her beauty means little and her career may continue on its path without change. There is not, I believe, a single former great film beauty now in her middle forties who, if she has a job at all, isn't condemned to roles designed to make movie audiences laugh. On the other hand, there are any number of formerly lovely ladies of forty, fifty and even sixty on the stage today who are far from being cruelly peddled to the trade as clowns.

HARVEY. NOVEMBER 1, 1944

A fantastic farce-comedy by Mary Chase. Produced by Brock Pemberton for a far beyond the season run in the 48th Street Theatre. Awarded the Pulitzer prize.

PROGRAM

MYRTLE MAE SIMMONS	Jane Van Duser	MARVIN WILSON	Jesse White
VETA LOUISE SIMMONS	Josephine Hull	LYMAN SANDERSON, M.D.	Tom Seidel
ELWOOD P. DOWD	Frank Fay	WILLIAM R. CHUMLEY, M.D.	Fred Irving Lewis
MISS JOHNSON	Eloise Sheldon	BETTY CHUMLEY	Dora Clement
MRS. ETHEL CHAUVENET	Frederica Going	MR. PEEPLES	Lawrence Hayes
RUTH KELLY, R.N.	Janet Tyler	JUDGE OMAR GAFFNEY	John Kirk
		E. J. LOFGREN	Robert Gist

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The library, afternoon.* Scene 2. *Chumley's Rest, an hour later.* Act II. Scene 1. *The library, an hour later.* Scene 2. *Chumley's Rest, four hours later.* Act III. *Chumley's Rest, a few minutes later.*

The action of the play takes place in a city in the Far West in the library of the old Dowd family mansion and the reception room of Chumley's Rest.

Time. *The present.*

SOME thirty-odd years ago H. L. Mencken composed a philosophy to the effect that the Creator had overlooked an idea in not surcharging the atmosphere about us with ethyl alcohol. Had He done so, pondered Mencken, the world would be infinitely happier and more contented than it is or has been; its inhabitants, breathing in the salubrious air, would be constantly maintained in a glowing, expansive, and beneficent state; peace and good will would reign on earth; and heroes would be born, in their own grandiose estimation, by the hour. Much this same philosophy is the core of Miss Chase's play, which, for all its several lapses, constitutes a generally delightful theatrical evening.

A mixture of fantasy, comedy and farce, that evening concerns a gentleman given to spirituous liquors who, while

in a blissful condition, meets up in alcoholic fancy with a rabbit six feet one and one-half inches tall and who enjoys him thereafter as a steady, understanding, and sympathetic companion. So enviable a companion is the rabbit, indeed, that others who have been wont to look askance at the cupful gentleman engage him as well, and find him all that his first discoverer has found him. The latter's family, however, like most unthinking families, presently deem it expedient that their blood-brother rid himself of the beast and to that end have him consigned to a sanitarium. But just as he is about to receive the treatment that will banish the rabbit forevermore they acquire wisdom from a passing taxi driver long versed in the way of humans — the wisdom, to wit, that teetotalers and other such theoretically normal fowl are quarrelsome, grasping, querulous, and miserable — and decide to allow their blood-brother to go on being as kindly, generous, happy, and sans souci as he has been.

As you may gather, what you have here is an extended paraphrase of the familiar skit in the burlesque shows wherein the inebriated low comedian is told that he is sitting opposite a great big beautiful luscious blonde and drinking champagne wine and wherein he thereupon for the next fifteen minutes accepts the delusion as fact and has himself a wonderful time, embroidered with the Pirandello and Synge (*The Well Of The Saints*) theory of the superiority of illusion to reality. In short, what the play dramatically is is the character of Joe, the gentle alcoholic out of Saroyan's *The Time Of Your Life*, provided with a rabbit variation of the burlesque blonde. But Miss Chase has added so much of her own and has played over the whole a fantasy at once so paradoxically realistic and basically so in keeping with life that her exhibit, despite an overly long induction and a third act that suffers a bad twelve-minute let-down, amounts in sum to excellent entertainment. Saroyan might on the whole have written a critically much better play on the theme, one touched with considerably more poetic imagination than Miss Chase's, but, in Saroyan's absence, Miss Chase's will do, and very nicely. What is more, nine people out of every ten (and that includes cer-

tain of the professional reviewers) have liked and will like it better than what Saroyan might have made of it. Which is the American theatre's reward, in a manner of speaking for keeping fancy closer to ground.

Some of Miss Chase's humor is exceptionally fertile. Her account of the barfly's first meeting with Harvey, which in the rabbit's name, after he had solicitously put a brother tosspot to bed is an example. "I saw him leaning against a lamp post when I came out and he called me by name," the lush tells an inquiring psychiatrist. "Didn't you think that rather peculiar?" asks the latter, significantly narrowing his eyes. "No," easily replies Elwood P. Dowd, the lush "you know how it is in a small town; everybody knows everybody else."

Harvey, according to Elwood, has some extraordinary virtues. He can stop clocks and you can go wherever you wish and do anything you please and when you come back you find that not so much as one minute has passed. And he does away with time and space and is better than Einstein, for he does away with time and space—and objections.

In the leading role, Frank Fay, the old vaudeville headliner, is capital. His drunk is not the more usual actor drunk who moves unsteadily about the stage or accompanies his speech with an obbligato of hiccups or engages in any other such ritualistic business, but one in whom a sincere absorption of alcohol has left only a benign fogginess and whose physical deportment and locutions are not materially different from those of the average abstemious member of society. Fay underplays as any long experienced lush always underplays, whereas the usual stage lush overplays like an amateur affected by two drinks. And as his sister who, though deeply concerned about him on one occasion also sees Harvey, Josephine Hull is an admirable comic foil.

Mr. Pemberton's physical production, designed by John Root, looks, however, as if it cost all of ten dollars.

DON'T, GEORGE! NOVEMBER 2, 1944

A comedy by Katherine Laure. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 21 performances in the Blackfriars' Theatre.

PROGRAM

ADELAIDE AVERSON	Carol Dunning	PAUL LELAND	Arthur Allen
GEORGE AVERSON	Hal Hershey	DAVID AVERSON	Jack O'Neil
LAURA CARWOOD	Romola Robb	EDYTHE AVERSON	Eleanor Stafford

SYNOPSIS: The entire action of the play takes place in the living-room of the Averson family. Act I. Early evening of a day in October, 1929. Act II. Scene 1. Early morning in April, 1941. Scene 2. Late afternoon of the same day. Act III. Scene 1. An evening several days later. Scene 2. Midnight the same day.

T

HE BLACKFRIARS' GUILD has devoted itself for the most part to the experimental drama. On this occasion its experiment lay in an apparent effort to duplicate the kind of play that shows up on Broadway at regular intervals and is dispatched forthwith to the storehouse. The experiment was successful.

Miss Laure is an apprentice in dramaturgy and her play sufficiently proves it to anyone conceivably unaware of the statistic. Dealing with a mother who tries to steal her sister's fiancé on behalf of her daughter and whose husband sets himself to undo her plans, her dramatic construction is such that her main characters are waved aside in midstream and her focus thereafter directed upon others considerably less material. She further mixes the moods of farce and drama and has a penchant for rather odious puns.

The Blackfriars' name this time was Gustav Blum.

ROBIN HOOD. NOVEMBER 7, 1944

Revival of the comic opera by Reginald De Koven and Harry B. Smith. Produced by R. H. Burnside for 15 performances in the Adelphi Theatre.

PROGRAM

ROBERT OF HUNTINGTON (AFTERWARDS ROBIN HOOD)	<i>Robert Field</i>	FRIAR TUCK	<i>Jerry Robbins</i>
SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM	<i>George Lipton</i>	ALAN-A-DALE	<i>Edith Herlick</i>
SIR GUY OF GIBSBORNE	<i>Frank Farrell</i>	LADY MARIAN FITZWALTER (A WARD OF THE CROWN, AFTERWARDS MAID MARIAN)	<i>Barbara Scully</i>
LITTLE JOHN	<i>Harold Patrick</i>	DAME DURDEN	<i>Zamah Cunningham</i>
WILL SCARLETT	<i>Wilfred Glenn</i>	ANNABEL	<i>Margaret Spencer</i>
<i>Milkmaids, Sheriff's Men, King's Men, Villagers, Archers, and Outlaws.</i>			

*SYNOPSIS: Act I. A market place in Nottingham. Act II. Sherwood Forest. Act III. Courtyard of the Sheriff's castle.
The scene is laid in England at the time of Richard I.*

WHENEVER ONE of these old comic operas is revived, members of the younger generation who have long heard their elders bask warmly in recollection of it are often to be observed scratching their noses, if polite, or fingering them, if not, and grunting to the effect that, if that is what the old days were like, good riddance to them and thank the gods for even *Bloomer Girl*.

The attitude of the younger folk is, however, contrary to the general idea not entirely the result of changed tastes. Tastes have changed much less than is commonly supposed, as the persistent success of operettas of years ago like those of Gilbert and Sullivan and like *Die Fledermaus* (*Rosalinda*) and *The Merry Widow* indicates. The theory that the younger generation is composed in its entirety of addicts to juke boxes and the Messrs. Sinatra and Crosby is hardly true. The adolescents who are addicted to them sel-

dom go to the theatre and hence do not figure in the argument. The young ones who do attend the theatre are of a relatively superior cut and are not wholly the ignorami their elders sometimes believe them to be.

There is, accordingly, something to be said for their attitude. Time and again a show that in its original incarnation was all that their elders' memories recall it to have been is, in revival, so lacking in its original brilliance that the elders themselves are tempted to adopt the youngsters' nose exercises. Time and again the principals figuring in the revival are so abjectly inferior to those in the bygone productions, the scenery and costumes so inexpedient, and the atmosphere of the whole so damp in comparison that the oldsters may be pardoned for doubting the merit of their former enthusiasm. The younger generation's attitude is thus like that of the little girl who saw Lillian Russell late in life when avoirdupois had overtaken her and who wondered audibly about the sanity of her old man who had told her that Lillian was the most gorgeous creature he had ever seen on the stage and boasted loudly that he had once quaffed champagne from her tiny slipper.

This latest revival of the De Koven operetta is a case in illuminating point. Produced originally in 1890 by that outgrowth of the Boston Ideal Opera Company which became famous under the name of the Bostonians, it caught the fancy of the public largely by virtue of its score and the exceptional aggregation that sang it. Not only did the De Koven music become a household piano word but its stage merchants soon figured among the pin-up favorites of the atregoers far and wide. The roster of the company, including such celebrated names as Henry Clay Barnabee, George B. Frothingham, William H. MacDonald, Jessie Bartlett Davis, *et al.*, was equalled by no other local comic opera troupe of the era.

Smith's romantic book, too, found favor with a public that welcomed a little relief from the many musical show books based upon stale French farces about the peccadillos of various Gastons and Fifis, or devised solely to exhibit Frank Daniels as an Ameer, Caliph, Grand Vizier or what-

not trying to trick the adventurous baritone out of stealing the idol's ruby eye, or concerned with fairy tales which seemed to center their legendary charm largely in trapdoors that didn't work. And though criticism here and there condescended to the exhibit as being "a comic opera with a monocle: one eye seeing English, the other American," it took its place as the first relatively authentic American item of its genre in the esteem of the theatre trade.

I did not see that opening production, but I did see it later on its road travels, and I saw the New York revivals in 1900 and 1902 with much the same principals, and I have seen, I think, almost every revival with other companies in the following years. And that is the reason why, within limits, I can sympathize with the youngsters who, now beholding the show for the first time, are skeptical as to what all the fever was for.

The voices in the present revival are generally unequal to the score, and not one of the principals has about him or her any faintest trace of the talent or stage splendor of the originals. In place of the Bostonians we have, eheu, the Burnsideans. And where once the stage offered a scenic and costume picture at least notable in its day, it now offers something not materially superior to Mr. Burnside's last season's Gilbert and Sullivan stage, which came near to hitting a new low. And the direction, which in earlier presentations of the comic opera aptly fused the score and book into a flowing entity, is of the slipshod species which lends to the evening the air of a succession of turns in which the performers come on, do their acts, and then either stand to one side looking over the house or walk off. So do not speak too harshly to the younger generation.

That generation's theory that we older folk are always inclined sentimentally to recall virtues in plays and shows of the past which probably were non-existent somehow occasionally has some sense in it. I say occasionally, for though I think it on the whole without merit in the instance of the Bostonians' version of this *Robin Hood*, I grant it considerable merit in the instance of certain subsequent revivals. To believe that all these revivals were deserving

of deep nostalgic sighs is worse than foolish. I have seen a revival or two that were no whit better than the poor one here considered. And I have seen at least one that was actually not quite so good.

But it is not the revivals, it is the Bostonians' performance that chiefly occupies us. And even in that case the younger generation may be tickled to know that not everything as a matter of fact was, in the phrase of their French governesses, *sans tache*. In its earliest stages, the show was found suddenly to go lifeless at one point and it was not until the subsequently famous "O Promise Me," derived from an old Italian song called "Forbidden Music," was incorporated that the dead spot was got rid of. (In later years and in other directions it was "Poor Butterfly" that was rushed in to save a big Hippodrome show and "They Wouldn't Believe Me" belatedly hurried into the breach from *The Girl From Utah* to fill a blank spot in, of all things, *The Dollar Princess*.)

The celebrated "Brown October Ale," furthermore, had to be staged in three different ways before its final full effect was realized. The stage lighting, in addition, at times seriously disturbed the equanimity of the historians, since the repertoire of the company operated to confuse the gentleman at the switchboard, with the result that Sherwood Forest now and again fitfully dazzled forth like the old Waldorf's ballroom and the market place took on the sombre gloom of the forest. And, finally, the internal jealousies of the company, which were to bring about its end in 1905, were haplessly not always too well concealed from the audiences. But the *Robin Hood* of the Bostonians was nonetheless, kids, a far, a very far cry — say about 10,000 miles — from the *Robin Hood* of the Burnsideans.

What inevitably ages in the old comic operas, including this one, is, naturally, some of the humor. Certainly such jocosities as "I dote on you" — "What I want is an antidote" hardly remain the source of any mirth. Nor do such bits of stage business as involve a male holding another male's hand under the impression that it is that of a woman who has slyly absented herself, or the two characters who

stealthily tiptoe on backward from opposite sides of the stage, bump into each other and thereupon give vent to frightened shrieks, or the inebriated character who in trying to make an exit bumps into a door, staggers back and then extends his forefinger as a guide and follows it through the door. But at their worst they are not any flatter and any staler than a lot of the jokes and byplay which infect the many musical shows of today and which seem greatly to entertain audiences. And, furthermore, there was all the difference in the world between the manner in which they were handled by such expert comics of the past as Barnabee and are handled by such inexpert ones of the present as George Lipton. There is, for example, nothing particularly funny about, say, the expression, "I'm mortified!"; a dozen minor comedians may proclaim it and leave an audience's features undisturbed; but let a proficient comedian like Jimmy Durante get his hands on it and it makes an audience howl for years on end.

IN BED WE CRY. NOVEMBER 14, 1944

A play by Ilka Chase, derived from her novel of the same title. Produced by John C. Wilson for 47 forced performances in the Belasco Theatre.

PROGRAM

JASPER DOOLITTLE	<i>Paul McGrath</i>	NICK VAN ALSTON
BRUCE MORELY	<i>John Kane</i>	<i>Maury Tuckerman</i>
DEVON ELLIOTT WAINWRIGHT	<i>Ilka Chase</i>	<i>Douglas Gregory</i>
SUZANNE	<i>Virginia Kaye</i>	<i>Ruth Matteson</i>
TIM WAINWRIGHT	<i>Francis DeSales</i>	<i>Claire Dangerfield</i>
HILDA	<i>Gynia Gray</i>	<i>Eleanor Audley</i>
MIRIAM DOYLE	<i>Claudia Walden</i>	<i>Harold Crane</i>
BARBARA HORLICK	<i>Helen Marcy</i>	<i>Frederic Tozer</i>
		<i>Milton Spelvin</i>
		<i>Elena Karam</i>

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. Devon Elliott's office in Devonshire House, evening, January, 1941. Scene 2. Devon's drawing-room. About six weeks later. Late February. Act II. Scene 1. The same. March, three weeks later. Scene 2. Kurt's apartment. November evening. Scene 3. The drawing-room, December evening, three days before Christmas. Act III. Scene 1. The office, April morning. Scene 2. The same, ten days later.

T

HE EXHIBIT is what is customarily described as a "smart" play, chiefly by the kind of fashionables whose vocabularies do not permit "smart" and "intelligent" as synonyms. A smart play, we have come to learn from them, is rather one in which a poverty in mentality is concealed in a wealth of external personal adornment, in which the characters perseveringly employ conversation to evade thought, and in which sex is an act negotiated on the part of the males not biologically but linguistically and on the part of the females in the miscellaneous manner of their canine prototypes.

There are other attributes common to the smart play. The manners are for the most part consistently bad; the morals are worse; and worldliness and sophistication are hopefully sought for through what is essentially only an impertinent parochialism. Insult is esteemed to be the

mark of a superior mind, and gentility, tenderness, sympathy, and normal decency are regarded as qualities impossibly demoded. The characters in the average smart play, in short, represent persons who in life would be denied entrance into any house of the slightest self-respect and who would be able to get into the other kind only on the score of their clothes and money.

An adroit playwright gifted with a satiric wit may of course lay hold of such materials and contrive an entertaining and very acceptable play out of them, as Maugham has attested on a number of occasions and as other writers for the stage, English, French and American, have similarly indicated. But given a playwright without such dramatic talent and without such wit and humor and what is most often likely to result is the sort of exhibit which oppositely reminds one of Kin Hubbard's explanation of the good, clean country air in the fact that the farmers keep their windows closed. Miss Chase's contribution, based on her novel of the same title, unfortunately leaves its windows open. And since she is deficient in any relieving wit or humor her play gives the nasal impression, usual under the circumstances, of a lot of very wet, soiled underclothes pinned up on a line to dry. The perfume is hardly edifying.

The lady's intense efforts to mold her materials into the pseudo-smart pattern only go to make her exhibit the more trying. Posing as a woman of the world, her dialogue indulges in such small town epigrams as "A woman too often mistakes a man's attention for intention" and in such marked-down cynicisms as "You surely don't mean to say that you are going to bed with your husband." Essaying to give her heroine's sexual excursions the desired smart off-hand air, her shortcomings as a writer succeed only in making the air off-color. And relying upon a modish couturier to make externally attractive what in internal character is repulsive she haplessly for her purposes brings down the house when in the role of her heroine she comes on in a white satin circus-horse creation with what appears to be a window-box of red geraniums attached to its rear and causes a lover upon beholding her in it raptly to exclaim,

"That gown, I take it, is calculated to reduce resistance!" thereupon promptly indicating his own unconditional surrender by fingering aside the bodice and imprinting a couple of loud labial smacks upon its wearer's bosoms.

• It thus certainly can not be said that Miss Chase, like certain other actresses who have composed plays in their own honor, hasn't had herself a time, usurping it from her audience. That she has mistaken vulgarity for smartness in any genuine sense and that she has confused dialogic brittleness with crispness, leading to lines that crack rather than crackle, doesn't seem to interfere with her personal pleasure in the least. She treats herself to enough entrances in fancy frocks to serve a pre-war Ambassadeurs revue; she causes herself to be addressed as "one of the most successful women in America" and to be greased by the other characters on her charm, intelligence, and powerful physical allure; she provides herself with three different men who are crazy about her and who can hardly live without her; she sends herself huge baskets of flowers; she gratifies herself with two or three scenes in which an actor-lover kisses her so long and passionately that she emerges from the picnic completely breathless; she allows herself an episode in which to display her bare legs; she presents herself as the superior of all the other characters on the stage in the matter of repartee; and she brings down the act curtains with herself invariably in the pitcher's box, and going strong.

As for her acting performance, it passed muster only when she called upon herself to discharge acidulous remarks. When she demanded of herself that she indicate any depth of emotion the result was a series of facial contortions which suggested a deeply troubled spirit infinitely less than an imminent very bad nose cold.

The most peculiar thing among the many peculiar things in a peculiar evening was the author's strange conviction that she had fashioned a highly sympathetic role for herself in the character of a woman who can not understand, simply because she has a former lover living in the same house with her and because she is indulging in an extensive affair with still another, why her husband sees fit to leave her.

SADIE THOMPSON. NOVEMBER 16, 1944

A musical version, by Rouben Mamoulian and Howard Dietz, of the play Rain by John Colton and Clemence Randolph, which was in turn a dramatization of W. S. Maugham's story, Miss Thompson; music by Vernon Duke, lyrics by Howard Dietz. Produced by A. P. Waxman for 60 performances and a loss of 180,000 dollars in the Alvin Theatre.

PROGRAM

JOE HORN	Ralph Dumke	CICELY ST. CLAIR	Doris Patston
CORPORAL HODGSON	Daniel Cobb	LAO LAO	Remington Olmsted
PRIVATE CRIGGS		SADIE THOMPSON	June Havoc
	Norman Lawrence	QUARTERMASTER BATES	
SERGEANT TIM O'HARA	James Newill		William Lynn
AMEENA	Grazia Narciso	REVEREND ALFRED DAVIDSON	Lansing Hatfield
HONEYPIE	Beatrice Kraft	PREMIERE DANSEUSE	
MRS. ALFRED DAVIDSON	Zolya Talma		Milada Mladova
	Marines, Natives and Children	PREMIER DANCER	Chris Volkoff

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Trader Joe Horn's hotel-store in Pago Pago, on the island of Tutuila, in the South Seas.* Scene 2. *The jungle.* Act II. *Same as Act I, Scene 1.*

T

THE GENERAL DISAPPOINTMENT in the presentation seemed to be predicated on three or four reasons, all of them wrong. It was contended, first, that *Rain* is essentially too serious a play to lend itself to musical treatment of any kind. The play *Porgy* is hardly less serious, yet it lent itself satisfactorily in the case of *Porgy and Bess*. It was argued, secondly, that there is something a little ridiculous in having a man of the church like the Rev. Davidson burst periodically into song. Yet it has never been thought ridiculous in the case of *Nanon*, *The Colleen Bawn*, etc. Thirdly, it was ventured that a musical exhibit which ends with death in shark-infested waters is hardly in proper key with the

medium. But one like *Norma* which ends with death on a funeral pyre has been perfectly acceptable. And, fourthly, there was complaint that the prostitute Sadie is not a sufficiently romantic character for a heroine in the musical form. Yet it is difficult to see why Sadie isn't a character quite as romantic as, say, the prostitute Panama Hattie in the successful show of that name. And the further contention that a harlot character is altogether too stale anyway for the current stage doesn't seem to hold in the case of the enormously successful *Anna Lucasta*.

If *Sadie Thompson* is a disappointment, it is not, surely, on any such counts. There is no reason in the world why it might not have been a good musical play. It isn't one simply because, while the play element is competent, the musical element is not, and because the whole enterprise has been damaged by the application to it of too much of what Broadway is pleased to regard as imagination.

This so-called imagination in the present instance goes a long way toward throwing a wrench into the show. Instead of leaving well enough alone, the producer has invested the proceedings with so much unnecessary embroidery in the way of arty choreography and choral numbers that the net impression is considerably less of the stimulating Thompson of the original Maugham fancy than of a depressing imitation of the Thompson of the old Hippodrome firm of Thompson and Dundy.

It is this embroidery that frequently interferes with the flow and flavor of the show and diminishes what might be its pleasure, much as the pleasure of a dinner is inevitably diminished by a similar too elaborate and intrusive service. If the enterprise had been allowed a greater measure of directness and simplicity, the result would have been, I dare-say, considerably more prosperous. As it is, the show gives the effect of a play vitiated by ballet, of ballet vitiated by choral singing, of choral singing vitiated by incidental pantomime, and of the whole intermittently invaded by colorless tunes set to malapropos lyrics. Surely such things as a paraphrase of Raymond Hitchcock's old ditty, "Life's A Funny Proposition," called "Life's A Funny Present" are

scarcely suitable to the character of Sadie Thompson in a serious moment. And such lyrics as "Poor As A Church Mouse" are considerably less fitting to the character in her lighter moments than such as "I Lived In A House With A Piano" and "I'm A Stayin'-in Girl For A Stayin'-out Man," which for some inscrutable reason were deleted during the rehearsal period. What the show all in all amounts to, in brief, is a hybrid composed of one-third *Rain*, one-third *Run*, *Little Chillun*, and one-third run-down juke box. Out of it emerges only a Sadie in the person of June Havoc who is pictorially perfect and dramatically often believable.

The "imagination" with which Mr. Mamoulian, the director, has invested the show, and wrecked it, is part and parcel of the current campaign in certain quarters to rid the stage of realism at all costs, however sound and in keeping with its particular medium it may happen to be. As one of the outstanding campaigners we have Mr. Mamoulian's hand-brother, Mr. Robert Edmond Jones, the well-known scene designer and himself also an occasional stage director. Performing in the public prints, this Mr. Jones issues with a somewhat more copious spray of indignation than several hundred other past joneses the aforesaid peremptory demand for less realism and more fancy. While it is far from me to disagree with him and his several hundred antecedents on the basic principle involved, I think that he, even more than the others, is guilty of something closely approaching a tin-horn snobbishness, which is no way to win arguments on behalf of the theatre or anything else.

"The other day at a cocktail party," he observes, "I found myself discussing the current theatre with a very charming and intelligent young woman. In the course of our conversation she said to me, 'I haven't seen many plays lately; they don't seem so interesting this season, somehow; do you think so? But I did see one good play last week. You know the one I mean — I never can remember names — the one that has the icebox in it. Do you know, that was a real icebox and those were real ice cubes. Now, that's the kind of a play I like.'"

Whereat Mr. Jones, his æsthetic soul revolted, shudder-

ingly exclaims, "Ice cubes!," as if they were the effluvium of a skunk.

Partly regaining his equilibrium, Mr. Jones then proceeds agonizedly to reflect on "the Childs restaurant which David Belasco set bodily on the stage of his theatre in the third act of *The Governor's Lady*, complete with real coffee urns and real waiters and real butter cakes." His tortured conclusion is that "here we are, after thirty years, face to face again with the old conflict between realism and imagination in the theatre, the same preoccupation with externalities."

It is something of a pity that Mr. Jones' experience and critical faculties are not so developed as his exasperation. The Belasco play of which he speaks was rubbish and would not have been any better in the way of imagination if the Childs restaurant scene had been omitted or even painted by Mr. Jones, in his most imaginative manner, on the backdrop. Furthermore, when he singles out the absurd Belasco realism as typical of the theatre in its year, which was 1912, he indicates a very poor acquaintance with the period. On that stage in the same year were such hardly realistic plays as Louis N. Parker's *At Versailles, 1780*, James Bernard Fagan's *Bella Donna*, Pierre Loti's *The Daughter Of Heaven*, Charles Rann Kennedy's adaptation of *The Flower Of The Palace Of Han*, Edward Sheldon's *The High Road*, Lady Gregory's *The Image*, and Edward Knoblauch's *Kismet*. Also Richard Walton Tully's *The Bird Of Paradise*, Compton Mackenzie's *Carnival*, Bernard Shaw's *Fanny's First Play*, Rostand's *The Lady Of Dreams*, the Hazelton-Benrimo *The Yellow Jacket*, Rudolf Besier's *Lady Patricia*, and Booth Tarkington's *Monsieur Beaucaire*. And in addition numerous such others as Galsworthy's *The Pigeon*, Synge's *Riders To The Sea*, the fairy tale play, *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs*, and Freksa's highly fanciful *Sumurun*.

Unlike the trashy *The Governor's Lady* with its real coffee urns, real waiters and real butter cakes, the current play upon which Mr. Jones heaps his scorn for its real icebox and real ice cubes (*The Voice Of The Turtle*) is a charm-

ing lyric comedy, imaginative, adroitly written, and altogether commendable. To sneer at it simply because it contains a few realistic properties, which, incidentally, are necessary to the play, is a childish business and quite as silly as it would be to scoff at Hauptmann's *The Weavers* for its real looms, real winding wheels and real cook-stove, at Shaw's *Man And Superman* for its real automobile, at O'Neill's *The Straw* for its real weighing machine, or at Sean O'Casey's *Purple Dust* for its real farm roller. Or, for that matter, at the production of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, in which Mr. Jones himself had a big hand, for its real horse.

That Mr. Jones and the brother joneses should either relinquish cocktail parties with their brain-confounding gins or select only those attended, God forbid, by professional critics, becomes further evident from his additionally derived indignations.

"I thought," he says, "of all the artists in other fields who have done and are doing so much to crystallize the increasingly dynamic point of view of our time." Whereupon he illustrates with, among others, the names of Virgil Thomson, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, E. E. Cummings, John Dos Passos, Ruth and Paul Draper, Angna Enters, George Balanchine, and Martha Graham. "And then," he rushes on, "I thought of the output of the Broadway theatre of 1944, contemporary, so far as its approach to life is concerned, with the Rogers Group and with Landseer's *Dignity And Impudence* and with the barroom nudes of Bougereau. Why is it, I asked myself, that the theatre so persistently avoids the possibilty of any contagion from the other arts?"

Since I do not cultivate cocktail parties and hence preserve myself in a measure from mist, I answer the question which raddles Mr. Jones. The theatre does not persistently avoid the contagion of which he speaks. What is more, it doesn't seem to profit greatly from it when it exposes itself to it. Consider some of the very names which our friend stipulates, at the top of his voice. Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein collaborated on *Four Saints In Three Acts*

which the theatre produced to no sound critical end. Mr. Thomson's so-called ballet-document, *Filling Station*, similarly didn't help much. Miss Stein has written a number of plays, all of them so bad that to produce them on the stage would be to suffer richly deserved ridicule. James Joyce has seen production with a play called *Exiles*, which was mediocre drama, and his *Finnegans Wake* constituted the body of *The Skin Of Our Teeth*, which I am prepared to give to Mr. Jones as a present, gratis. John Dos Passos has been represented in the theatre by *The Moon Is A Gong* and *Airways, Inc.*, neither of which disclosed anything beyond an arbitrary desire to "experiment"; both were wholly negligible contributions to the drama. And E. E. Cummings, if memory serves, had his chance with a play called *Him*, which explored nothing in the vein of dramatic merit.

As for the others Mr. Jones sighs over, George Balanchine has already served the theatre, and well, in connection with a number of musical shows and operettas, and Eugene Loring, whom Mr. Jones forgets to name, is responsible for a lot of the delight in *Carmen Jones*. Paul Draper has displayed his dancing art on the stage, and Ruth Draper her mimetic art, and Angna Enters her pantomimic art, and Martha Graham her choreographic art, and one or two of them have further had a hand, if I am not mistaken, in certain productions. But, with all their talent, just how the drama can profitably catch anything contagious from Paul Draper's tap dance steps or from Ruth Draper's imitations, I, for one, must doubtless go to a cocktail party to learn. (It didn't catch anything, save a very bad headache, from Miss Draper's colleague, Cornelia Otis Skinner, when she invaded it with *Edna, His Wife*.) Nor can I see, teetotaler that I am at the fleeting moment, just how Miss Enters' pantomimes might be instrumental in injecting more imagination into the drama than was injected many years ago by the plays *Sumurun*, *L'Enfant Prodigue*, *Puppet-Play*, et al., or how Miss Graham has anything that might influence to their prosperity the imaginations of a herd of new young Eugene O'Neills or even Saroyans, presuming their birth or existence.

Apparently still inflamed by his Martini, Mr. Jones' dudgeon thereupon takes the form of a denunciation of the later plays. "They are not," he cries out, "plays so much as animated photographs, candid camera shots of life, living movies with a few exciting 'personal appearances' thrown in from time to time for good measure. They do not, properly speaking, belong to the theatre at all."

When Mr. Jones goes on the waterwagon again, we may venture to ask him how the following more recent plays fit his definitions of mere "animated photographs, candid camera shots and living movies": *A Highland Fling, The Innocent Voyage, Harvey, The Pirate, Lady In The Dark, Outrageous Fortune, Career Angel, Dark Of The Moon, The Glass Menagerie*, etc., etc.

Melancholiously negotiating the olive, Mr. Jones, summing up his laments, thuswise finally composes his misery: "I tried to communicate some of these thoughts to my companion ['the very charming and intelligent young woman' who had made the initial remark about ice cubes] who looked at me with an expression of growing bewilderment from under her dizzy little hat with the hortensias on it. As I turned away to say goodbye to my hostess her voice followed me: 'Well, I don't care what he said, I liked that play!'"

As Mr. Jones turned away, my voice, had I been at the party, would have followed him along with that of the young woman's.

Mr. Jones and all the other joneses who have resolved themselves into an Imagination Salvation Army commit, I believe, the same error in logic. That they are to be commended for praying for a drama that will more often fly aloft to the stars is surely open to no question, and I hereby add my own pat on the back to that of everyone else who has any affection and respect for the theatre. It is, however, their conception of what constitutes imagination in drama that transforms that pat on the back into a somewhat lower section of the anatomy.

It seems to be their idea, promulgated either directly or

by implication, that true imagination is necessarily and inevitably linked with experiment and that, inferentially, it does not and can not flower in the more conventional dramaturgical patterns. Among his other cocktail meditations, Mr. Jones, for example, nominated directly in this connection plays like *The Green Pastures*, *Mourning Becomes Electra* and *The Great God Brown*. Now, while there is no gainsaying that these plays were invested simultaneously with imagination and experiment, it nevertheless stands gainsaying that such non-experimental (in the jonesian sense) plays as, say, the same authors' *The Wisdom Tooth*, *Anna Christie* and *Desire Under The Elms* were, for that reason, devoid of imagination. Imagination, surely, is not necessarily confined to skeletonized scenery, masks, four-hour plays or sets manipulated, as in *The Skin Of Our Teeth*, which Mr. Jones also names, by ropes in the hands of the actors. One might even argue that such things and others like them proudly hinted at by the joneses do not even constitute experiment, since most of them, far from falling under that head, have seen previous use in the theatre.

The so-called realistic drama, further, has often shown an imagination far superior to what the joneses endorse as the drama of fancy, romance, and imagination. There is infinitely greater imagination, in any sound critical appraisal, in Hauptmann's *Drayman Henschel* than in something like Maeterlinck's *Alladine and Palomides*. There is much more true imagination in a play like Strindberg's *The Dance Of Death* than in one like Rostand's *The Romancers*. And I'll give Mr. Jones all the imagination he seems to be able to find in the aforesaid *The Skin Of Our Teeth* for the imagination in even a single act of a purely realistic play like *Of Mice And Men*.

But while the joneses, along with myself, may, whatever our respective definitions, demand imagination in the theatre, it seems to be doubtful that we aren't pretty much alone in the demand. Nine out of every ten imaginative plays — and I here submit to the Jones definition — which have been produced in our theatre in the recent years have,

whatever their quality, proved to be commercial failures. On the side of quality the failures have ranged all the way from *The Beautiful People*, *A Highland Fling*, *My Heart's In The Highlands*, *Magic*, and *Murder In The Cathedral* to, on the other side, *Lily Of The Valley*, *Mr. Sycamore*, *Talking To You*, *Achilles Had A Heel*, and *Kindred*. Dozens of plays, relative quality or little, like *Thunder Rock*, *Time And The Conways*, *I Have Been Here Before*, *Heavenly Express*, *Love's Old Sweet Song*, *Across The Board On Tomorrow Morning*, *On Stage*, and *How Beautiful With Shoes*, which at their poorest at least ventured some imagination, may here and there have gratified the joneses, and here and there the nathans, but apparently they gratified no one else.

What the theatre most often evidently prefers is *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* and *Kiss And Tell*.

THE STREETS ARE GUARDED
NOVEMBER 20, 1944

*A play by Laurence Stallings. Produced by John C. Wilson
for 24 performances in the Henry Miller Theatre.*

PROGRAM

ADMIRAL OVERHOLD, U.S.N.	CORPORAL CROFTON, U.S.A.A.F.
<i>Len Doyle</i>	<i>Joel Marston</i>
COLONEL WHITE, U.S.M.C.	CHOPPY, MUSICIAN 2ND CLASS,
<i>Gordon Nelson</i>	<i>U.S.N. Jack Manning</i>
HOSPITAL CORPSMAN, U.S.N.	ANGELIKA Jeanne Cagney
<i>David Lewis</i>	NAVAL AIDE, LIEUT. COMDR.,
TOM JELKS, CH. PHAR. MATE,	<i>U.S.N. John Efrat</i>
<i>U.S.N. Morton L. Stevens</i>	SEAMAN, U.S.N. Byron Griffith
THE MARINE	SEAMAN, U.S.N. Terry Little
<i>Phil Brown</i>	HANSON, CH. YEOMAN, U.S.N.
MEMPHIS JONES, CH. BOSUN'S	<i>Lewis Charles</i>
<i>MATE, U.S.N. George Mathews</i>	A COLONEL OF MARINES
MASTER SERGEANT WINTERS,	<i>Roderick Maybee</i>
<i>U.S.A.A.F. Robertson White</i>	
CORPORAL BEASELEY, U.S.A.A.F.	
<i>Paul Crabtree</i>	

The time is the immediate past, the action taking place at the U. S. Naval Hospital at Washington, and on an island in the Pacific.

MISTER STALLINGS' chief stock in dramatic trade has been the kind of lustiness associated with either the drinking cup or the pursuit of the female of the species. His merchants of it have been either twentieth-century Gambrini in military uniforms or seventeenth-century Casanovas in buccaneer regalia. With such characters and their detonating vocabularies he has been most at home. When he has briefly departed from them and joined up with those somewhat more punctilious, he has been a fish out of water. His stamping-ground has been where men are men and where words of more than four letters, aside from a certain lengthier genealogical phrase, are socially ostracized. He has been, in short, a tough guy.

Though hard-boiled, he has been, however, no egg. A bit of ham, possibly, but no egg. He has known how to write; he has had a proper feel for drama; and his subject matter has usually been close to his knowledge and in some degree to his experience. If on occasion he has seemed to bluff, it was to be allowed that he generally had at least two good cards out of five. Which, say what you would, as the game went was something.

In this, his latest effort, he is again where he belongs, among the robust men of the armed forces in World War II. But something has happened to him. Here and there are still traces of his old salty dialogue and his old round oaths and his old ribald swing. Yet a new, strange and badly muddled mysticism has crept into his writing like a dank mist and has cast a pallor over most of it. And his play, as a consequence, gives one the impression of his rare old Quirt and Flagg out of the worthy *What Price Glory?*, which he wrote in collaboration with Maxwell Anderson twenty-one years ago, dreamily confusing their gay booze companion Charmaine with the Angel of the Marne and all three sanctimoniously climbing on the waterwagon.

Nor is that the only impression left by the play. An even deeper and more general one is of a patchy paraphrase of *The Passing Of The Third Floor Back* with the Stranger in a Marine's uniform. There is no reason why an amalgam of realism and mysticism might not have served the play as Stallings initially visualized it, but while his imagination has automatically encompassed the realism it has failed him completely in the instance of the mysticism, and the result of his attempt to create an analogy between the Saviour and a mysterious Marine operating on the South Pacific front is confusion twice confounded.

The play is further weakened by the author's conviction, shared by most of his war-play contemporaries, that the incorporation of a female element is necessary, however at odds it may possibly be with the immediate dramatic materials. This element, while occasionally justifiable, is more often, as in the present case, simply so much decorative parsley, pretty to look at and sometimes vaguely appetizing

but of no value whatever to the dramatic meat itself. The wide success of a poor war play like the English *Journey's End* may possibly have been credited to the novelty of its womanless cast of characters, although there was some skepticism on that distaff score on the part of a few saucy American critics. Most of the war plays that failed in the period of and following the first World War as well as those that have failed in the period of the second have been little other than Henry Arthur Jones and his lady friends in uniform. For one *Lifeline* minus the ladies, which, however, was otherwise so faulty it could not have succeeded even had it included a *Follies* chorus, all that the majority of other recent war play failures have needed to convert them into successes were a few good tunes by Jerome Kern or Richard Rodgers, along with maybe costumes by Raoul Pene Du Bois.

A second reflection. Among the many later war plays, including this, which thus far have emerged from America, England and Russia there has been none with a theatrically romantic hero. Whereas the plays dealing not only with the first World War but with wars from the beginning of dramatic time have here and there offered in their central figures magnificos to warm the cockles of the romantic heart, the more recent exhibits have purveyed protagonists sympathetic, pitiable, admirable, valiant, efficient and what not else, but in no case that I recall one of the rose-wreathed and imagination-bouncing fellows of other days.

The more war becomes a matter steadily less of brilliant plumes and shining swords and dazzling uniforms and is increasingly resolved into politics, mathematics and machines this is perhaps bound to be. The picturesqueness of past wars has gone with the wind, and with it inevitably the picturesqueness of its heroes. And thus it is that we presently have protagonists little different from so many business men in olive drab suits, and making the same kind of speeches, the same kind of gestures, and even the same kind of love.

Since it would require altogether too much space to give a complete catalogue in illustrative proof, run your eye

quickly over some of the specimens factually disclosed in the last three or four seasons:

Elderly sea captains viewing the war as just another prosaic job; Cockney barge owners belatedly waking up to danger only when their shacks have been bombed by the enemy; surgeons going about their business as impersonally as veterinarians; Russian officers comporting themselves like Dun and Bradstreet bookkeepers; wearied soldiers trapped in cellars with Nazis and struggling for two stage hours against fatal drowsiness; and American farm youths sentimentally resigning themselves to the cause and, after kissing their girls a brief goodbye, making off and subsequently conducting their action with letters to the girls and to their parents. All thoroughly commendable, surely, but hardly romantic by the theatre of yesterday's star-woven and emotionally stimulating standards.

Go on. Civilians converting themselves into saboteurs and going about their jobs like so many union plumbers; aviators losing their flying nerve because their wives are philandering with movie actors; other aviators who, after announcing that they have just shot down an enemy plane, spend the rest of the evening miscellaneous fondling the wenches in a barroom; profound college professors exerting themselves to persuade twelve-year-old Nazi children that they have been on the wrong track; and Mayors of small invaded towns philosophizing: "I am afraid, I am terribly afraid, and I thought of all the things I might do to save my own life, and then" — and then scholastically quoting Socrates.

Go on further. Soldiers held by the enemy and leaning weakly on Helen Hayes to liberate them; English secret service agents made fools of by a Nazi masquerading as the British Chief of Staff; clergymen in Scottish bomb cellars trying to beat Hitler with prayers; young American soldiers in camp fluctuating between their love for burlesque strip-teasers and their duty; Norwegian barbers' sons shoveling Nazi corpses down cellar doors; privates spouting war economics for two and one-half hours; young English soldiers*

billetted in rich homes and insulting their hosts with belligerent reflections on class distinctions; young Russians betraying their Chinese allies and learning their lesson from female dipsomaniacs; and now, in this *The Streets Are Guarded*, an American Marine wandering about the stage like a Sunday school teacher and, worse, talking like one.

The romantic heroes of war drama from the time of ancient Greece to William Gillette must be turning over in their tombs.

Mr. Stallings noted in the program his thanks for assistance in details of his play to the various personnel of the Offices of Public Relations of the United States Army, United States Navy, United States Marine Corps, and the Armed Guard Center at Mitchell Field. He somehow neglected to include the late Ed Howe from whom he liberally borrowed various lines as, for just one example, "Keep your mouth shut and your bowels open."

THE LATE GEORGE APLEY

NOVEMBER 21, 1944

A play by John P. Marquand and George S. Kaufman, based on the Marquand novel of the same name. Produced by Max Gordon for a beyond the season run in the Lyceum Theatre.

PROGRAM

MARGARET	<i>Mrs. Priestly Morrison</i>	HORATIO WILLING	<i>Reynolds Evans</i>
GEORGE APLEY	<i>Leo G. Carroll</i>	JANE WILLING	<i>Catherine Proctor</i>
CATHERINE APLEY	<i>Janet Beecher</i>	AGNES WILLING	<i>Margaret Phillips</i>
JOHN APLEY	<i>David McKay</i>	HOWARD BOULDER	<i>John Conway</i>
ELEANOR APLEY	<i>Joan Chandler</i>	LYDIA LEYTON	<i>Ivy Troutman</i>
WILSON	<i>Byron Russell</i>	EMILY SOUTHWORTH	<i>Mabel Acker</i>
AMELIA NEWCOMBE	<i>Margaret Dale</i>	JULIAN H. DOLE	<i>Howard St. John</i>
ROGER NEWCOMBE	<i>Percy Waram</i>	HENRY	<i>Sayre Crawley</i>

SYNOPSIS: Act I. George Apley's house in Beacon Street, Boston. Thanksgiving Day, 1912. Act II. A week later. Act III. The following morning. Epilogue. A corner of the Berkeley Club, 1924.

A NOVEL FREQUENTLY loses some of its inner dimension on its way into play form just as a play invariably loses even more of its on its way into cinema form. Marquand's esteemed novel is no exception, yet enough of its savour remains to constitute the dramatization a generally sufficient job and one which provides a very genial theatrical evening. What critical faults the play has are not, in view of the skill of the presentation, likely to concern the spectator while he is engaging it but will assail him only the next morning, like a minor hangover.

Admirably staged by Mr. Kaufman save for some cannon-ball exits which periodically suggest that George Abbott must be a secret guest in the otherwise sedate Apley house and for an oversight in allowing several younger members of the company an application of so much facial makeup

Rhapsody. November 22, 1944

An operetta by Fritz Kreisler, book by Leonard Levinson and Arnold Sundgaard, based on a story by A. N. Nagler; lyrics by John LaTouche. Produced by Blevins Davis and Lorraine Manville Dresselhuys for 14 performances in the Century Theatre.

PROGRAM

LOTZI HUGENHAUGEN	John Cherry	IVAN	George Zortitch
LILI HUGENHAUGEN	Gloria Storey	SONYA	Alexandra Denisova
CHARLES ECKERT	John Hamill	EMPEROR FRANCIS I	
FRAU TINA HUGENHAUGEN	Bertha Belmore		George Young
ILSE BONEN	Patricia Bowman	EMPRESS MARIA THERESA	
GRETA	Mildred Jocelyn	CAPTAIN OF THE PALACE	Annamay Dickey
CASANOVA	Eddie Mayehoff	GUARD	Randolph Symonette
MADAME BOTICINI	Rosemarie Brancato	JAILER	Gar Moore
DEMI-TASSE	Mister Johnson	SPECIALTY DANCER	Jerry Ross

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. Music room of the Hugenhaugen home. Scene 2. Gardens at Schoenbrunn Palace. Scene 3. A room in the palace. Scene 4. Maywine Pavilion outside Vienna. Act II. Scene 1. The jail. Scene 2. Anteroom of the Empress' chambers. Scene 3. Apartment of Casanova in the palace. Scene 4. A hall in the palace. Scene 5. The ballroom of Schoenbrunn Palace.

Time. Reign of Maria Theresa.

Place. Vienna.

THE NOVICE PRODUCERS of this venture, having observed that seven out of the twelve new musical exhibits put on last season had failed to a total tune of more than one million dollars and having scrutinized the reasons therefor, sought to avoid their forebears' errors but in the avoiding committed some worse ones of their own.

Figuratively taking their hapless forebears by the hand, they seemed to address them as follows:

In the first place, gentlemen, you apparently had not

learned that the public is dead sick of your smutty jokes. If perchance you here and there did learn it, you put your learning to use long after the cow was out of the stable, as in some such case as *Jackpot*, from which you deleted the smut a week after the show opened and when it already had been stamped as an irrevocable failure. The trouble with these dirty jokes by and large is not so much that they are dirty as that they aren't jokes. They are for the preponderant part not the least funny, and they hit an audience in the ear like so many mudballs. If in the future you can find a first-rate such joke or even a good second-rate one, go ahead and use it. We will promise to laugh with the rest of the house, only louder. But let us meanwhile stop this peddling of dull muck. *We* certainly shall.

Secondly, there is the matter of your topical songs, particularly those like "New York Is Like That," "What's New In New York," and the sort. The public has had enough of them. If you thought, as in the instance of your 100,000 dollar failure called *Allah Be Praised!*, that it would still experience a sublime treat in such lyrics as "You don't see Mrs. Vanderbilt at Lindy's, and Lindy doesn't hang out at the Ritz," you now know that you were badly mistaken. Yet let one of you still get hold of a number including some such schmalz as "If you want to be sardonic about Sardi's, eat your sardines at the Auto-mat," and you will persist in being as high-spirited as a baby with the hives. And if one of you then gets hold of a lyric writer who is a really great genius and who wittily inserts "mit onions" after the Automat, and you have it sung by a woman who delivers it with such beaming self-assurance as suggests it surpasses anything ever written by Samuel Butler, you will begin dreaming of the crowds storming McBride's and Tyson's. The next morning you will duly wake up and begin wondering where you are going to be able to borrow a quarter. *We* certainly shall not commit that mistake.

In the third place, when one of you goes into a huddle at "21" with the book writer for that show you are contemplating, pause and reflect on the big success in the last two seasons of the revivals of musical comedies and operettas

out of the past. Reflect, in short, on the fact that the books of these older shows have all of them that air of romance which is so valuable to the musical stage but which nevertheless is generally neglected in the kind of shows you put on nowadays. After all, when one goes to a musical show one goes in something of a moonlight and champagne mood and that mood isn't exactly promoted into any high estate by books dealing with a band of female horn blowers trying to land a radio contract on a program boosting a cathartic, as in *Hairpin Harmony*; or with a squad of aviators quartered in the dormitory of a girls' school and jumping up and down like kangaroos and yelling "Oh, boy!" on finding a pair of ladies' lace drawers, as in *What's Up*; or with a female whose husband is in the zipper business and whose orchid delicacy is indicated in periodic complaints that the trouble with him is that he is all zippers and no zip, as in *My Dear Public*. We certainly shall not be guilty of any such error.

We don't say that what the public should be given instead is necessarily the kind of book in which the beautiful Princess falls in love with Rudolf, the commoner, and learns later at the big Autumn ball in the castle that he is really a Duke in disguise. Such books can be pretty bad, too. But we do believe that the public is surfeited with the other kind, usually concocted by someone like George Marion, Jr., in which the Princess is converted into a hot blues singer in love with a Rudolf converted into a traveling salesman of gents' suspenders and ending up in a castle converted into a red light establishment. It might not be so hard on the public, awful as it is, if things were allowed to rest there, but when it turns out that Rudolf is a Yale man and proves it by coming on in the second act in a red and green blazer and singing something about Dorothy Lamour to the tune of "Old Nassau" in swing time — when such bootleg poison is served to the public it seems to be a little too much. We certainly have learned that lesson.

Then, fourthly, there is the routine matter of the showgirls. Whereas in such older musicals as *The Merry Widow* and *Rosalinda* they are incorporated with some sense of

value into a gala at Maxim's or a ball in Orlofsky's palace, in the later day shows they are dragged onto the stage without rhyme or reason and are simply stood around like dummies suffering from a suffusion of chilblains. Looking at stage after stage and seeing always the same lines of altitudinous clothes-horses doing nothing but seemingly waiting around for Shipwreck Kelly to sit on them is not, we believe, the average man's idea of a particularly gay evening. And when on occasion one or more of the icicle-covered skyscrapers is given a line to speak and speaks it in a voice resembling a fingernail scratching a slate the gayety isn't noticeably augmented. We herewith accordingly set about proposing the organization of a Society For the Prevention of Show-Girls, and announce our candidacy for the board of governors.

In the fifth place, let something further be done about the leading female singers. For one acceptable one like Ethel Merman we usually get two or three who are apparently of the conviction that all it takes to be a Merman is to strut down to the footlights, put on a fixed plumber's smile, and accompany a number with a lot of shadow-boxing in the direction of the audience. The next time we go to a show and see one of these steam-boilers trying to get a song over by throwing her fists at the customers we are going to get up and go around to Madison Square Garden where such pugilism is considerably more relevant.

We come to Item 6, in other words, to the gag writers. Finding that his book hasn't enough comedy, the producer, instead of persuading the author to apply himself to thinking it up in key with the rest of his book, calls in one or more jesters of the species who concoct wheezes for radio programs, night club masters of ceremonies, and the like. These wits duly hurry into the breach with wonderful lines like "I grew up in Brooklyn" — "You don't look like a tree to me" and the delighted producer incorporates them into that scene in the book wherein the fashionable Palm Beach hostess is giving a musicale for Abyssinian royalty. The result is not, we believe, exactly what might be termed colossal.

Now and then, by one of those rare accidents that no one can account for, one of the extraneous gags may turn out to be funny. But more often in their grimness they only emphasize the lack of the book's comedy which otherwise might not be quite so depressing. And, funny or not, they invalidate the flow of the book by being arbitrarily inserted at the wrong points. It isn't entirely conducive to comfort to have a scene in which the hero is making love to the heroine in a rose-bower interrupted by a lackey who drops a tray on his foot and thereupon howlingly pulls the one about wishing it had been a deuce.

In the seventh place, how about a little rest from the notion that the comedian must inevitably be given a song to sing in the last act? Maybe it is part of a comedian's regular contract. If it is, we don't suppose anything can be done about it. But if it isn't, let's have an end to it. It wouldn't be so bad if the songs were amusing, but the average producer somehow inscrutably seems to think that even the dullest lyric imaginable becomes a riot if only the comedian of the show delivers it.

Some of us have been going to the theatre now for more years than Lee Shubert can remember. We have in those years laughed fit to kill at any number of comedians. But in all those years laughter has generally deserted us when the otherwise grand boys have felt it incumbent upon them to come down to the front of the stage around 10:30 and demonstrate their comic prowess in song. In all that long time we have heard not more than half a dozen such songs out of hundreds that had anything comical about them. One was "Who Paid The Rent For Mrs. Rip Van Winkle When Rip Van Winkle Was Away?" Another was "Mister Dooley." And the other four were those serio-comic numbers, we forgot their names, that Raymond Hitchcock used to croak toward the end of his several performances. Most of the others have only succeeded in spoiling what impression the comedians have made before they ventured them.

We will not fall into any such traps with our own venture. We will go back to the romantic operetta form uncorrupted by the Yale man in the red and green blazer; we will

have no smutty jokes; we will have no icicle show-girls; we will permit no Lindy and Automat lyrics; our female singers will refrain from engaging in fisticuffs with the audience; and our comedian will not be allowed to come down to the footlights around 10:30 and gratify his vanity with a vocal burst. And the public, we believe, will be duly grateful and make our venture a huge success.

The novice producers kept their promises. They eliminated the dirty jokes and substituted for them such as "He's a perpetual emotion machine"; "You ought to be thankful you're in jail because you couldn't get a room anywhere else these days"; and "This drink will pick you up" — "I hope it won't lay me down." They eliminated the show-girls and substituted for them a quota of toe-dancers who came on at regular intervals and, with set grins instead of the polar expressions, each and every time went through exactly the same toe routines. They eliminated the lyrics about Lindy's and the Automat and offered in place of them lyrics about how young the world is when one is in love and about the determination of men to be free in the world. They eliminated the lackey who drops a tray on his foot and such bourgeois humor as involves arboreal life in Brooklyn and substituted such refined humor as concerns cheeses, bedbugs, and warts. And, finally, they set themselves to present a book with all the desired old-time moonlight and champagne flavor.

In this last connection their procedure suggested the children's game wherein the youngsters apprise one another what they would do if they had a million dollars and, after all kinds of transcendent dreams, find themselves compromising with the same old five-cent lollipop at the corner drugstore. With the million dollars or a reasonable percentage thereof actually at their command they ended up at the same drugstore but came out without even the nickel lollipop. With bundles of money at their beck — their show represented an investment of \$65,000 dollars — and with a Fritz Kreisler score safe in the bank, they huddled in the back yard over a libretto that would richly satisfy the occasion and got back to the house with one of those Alt Wien

court intrigue numbers that have gathered so much dust that only an Okie could grope his way through them.

Their belated, gloomy and defeated conclusion that such poor books are perhaps unavoidable and that a really good one is almost impossible to find remains the facile delusion of producers whose imagination is confined to their purses. One can hardly get a well-fitting suit at the grocer's and one can hardly get a well-fitting musical book by patronizing the grocer's literary equivalents. One of these days operetta producers like those under immediate consideration are going to startle the theatre by passing up the spinach merchants and hiring writers who got tired of *Alt Wien* the day Johann Strauss died, who are content to leave the humors of the Nishes, Fishes and fat court chamberlains to by-gone generations, and whose flights of fancy do not end in white satin ball gowns, mastodonic crystal chandeliers, and scenes in which an emperor, prince or baritone lover has to hide in a wardrobe.

Rhapsody in due and quick course dropped the novice producers' \$65,000 dollars.

THE MAN WHO HAD ALL THE LUCK
NOVEMBER 23, 1944

*A play by Arthur Miller. Produced by Herbert H. Harris
for 4 performances in the Forrest Theatre.*

PROGRAM

SHORY	Grover Burgess	AMOS BEEVES	Dudley Sadler
J. B. FELLER	Forrest Orr	DAN DIBBLE	Sydney Grant
HESTER FALK	Eugenia Rawls	GUSTAV EBERSON	Herbert Berghof
DAVID BEEVES	Karl Swenson	HARRY BUCKS	James MacDonald
AUNT BELLE	Agnes Scott Yost	AUGIE BELFAST	
PATTERSON BEEVES	Jack Sheehan		Lawrence Fletcher

SYNOPSIS: A small Mid-Western town, not so long ago. Act I. Scene 1. David Beeves' repair shop. An evening in early April. Scene 2. The same. Three days later, near dawn. Scene 3. The same. Several hours later. Act II. Scene 1. The living-room of David's house. July. About two years later. Early afternoon. Scene 2. A spare bedroom in David's house. Later that evening. Act III. Scene 1. David's living-room. A night the following January. Scene 2. The same. An evening one month later.

T

HE AUTHOR'S THEME was the venerable one relating to whether man's fate is preordained or whether it rests in his own hands. His treatment of it was so diffuse, disorderly and opaque that it was often impossible to decipher just what he was driving at. As is sometimes the eccentricity in such circumstances, this difficulty in understanding clearly what he had in mind however led some people to mistake the fog for the veil of a prophet and the author himself for one very possibly gifted with an enormous esoteric profundity. What he seemed to others, including the present recorder, was simply a very bad tyro playwright with but a single thought in his head, and that the entirely obvious one above noted. Moreover, it remained in his head, since no trace of it beyond a dim shadow made its appearance in his play and since that shadow was produced in the pervading mist by the tiniest ray of illumination imaginable. What the exhibit on the whole seemed to be was an amateurish

paraphrase and extension of the kind of one-act vaudeville play written twenty-five or thirty years ago by Aaron Hoffman and covered with the species of quasi-philosophical sauce which intermittently was smeared over such other old vaudeville dramatic playlets as those in which Robert Hilliard was wont proudly to display himself.

That is about as near to any inner description of the bisque as I can come, since much of it, as I have said, baffled my attempts to make head or tail of it, though two of my colleagues professed to find the job very simple indeed, albeit each seemed peculiarly to arrive at a totally different conception of it. It was easy enough to follow the physical actions of the playwright's protagonist and also of the protagonist's brother, the one a garage mechanic whose luck never ran out on him and the other an ambitious baseball player with whom luck declined to flirt. It was also easy enough to follow the upward progress of the former and the downward progress of the latter. But the author's reflections on the fate of both and the means whereby each, the former in particular, embraced it were either so cloudy or so distorted that the play took on the aspect of a tin mirror. And his apparent ultimate conclusion that it was hard work and a nimble mind that alone were responsible for what seemed to be mere luck was so undemonstrated by his central character that most of the audience confidently expected the final curtain to come down upon the spectacle of everyone on the stage squirting seltzer siphons at one another and with the central character thereupon stepping to the foot-lights and confiding to the house that the whole enterprise had been conceived as burlesque — and that money would be refunded at the box-office to anyone who had not duly appreciated it early in the evening and was conceivably disappointed.

That the play was at least an unintentional burlesque of its theme was, however, the one thing that a liberal share of the audience, the two reviewers alluded to among the few exceptions, could clearly understand about it. For just how hard work and mind could otherwise figure in the luck of a character predicated on the fortuitous arrival in his

garage of an Austrian refugee who explained to him the intricacies of automobile machinery which before he could not comprehend, on the death by accident of the man who stood in the way of his marriage, on the fact that he wished for a male offspring and that his wife presently delivered it to him, and on other such phenomena would have been something a bit difficult of satisfactory digestion.

WALK HARD. NOVEMBER 30, 1944

A play by Abram Hill, based on the novel Walk Hard—Talk Loud by Len Zinberg. Produced by the American Negro Theatre for 42 performances in the 135th Street Library Theatre.

PROGRAM

ANDY WHITMAN	Roy Allen	LOU FOSTER	Joseph Kamm
MACK WHITFIELD	Leonard Yorr	LARRY BATCHELO	Ray Marlowe
BOBBY	John Hickton	THE BARTENDER	Morris Singer
BENTLEY	Joe Nathan	DOROTHY	Dale Shell
RUTH	Ruby Dee	SADIE	Aida Marlowe
MR. BERRY	Fred Carter	THE BELLHOP	Bob Wilkes
CHARLIE WHITMAN	Maurice Lisby	THE HOTEL CLERK	Bentley Edmonds
BECKY	Jacqueline Andre	LADY FRIEND	Cathy Parsons
HAPPY	Howard Augusta	A REPORTER	Samuel Stone
MICKEY	Milton Gordon		

THE STORY OF the play is of a young Negro prize-fighter who simultaneously battles race prejudice on his fighting way toward the ring championship. Some of the detail is vivid and theatrically whetting, as in the case of the seamy side of professional pugilism with its assortment of cheap hangers-on, brash palookas, crooks, and general fungi. But the play itself often wanders aimlessly out of focus and dawdles into a spurious happy ending which corrupts the whole. Upon a basis of authentic realism the playwright has also superimposed a measure of symbolism about the evil of physical force which corrupts that whole twice over and diminishes doubly what power the play might possibly have enjoyed had he told his story with directness and simplicity.

As a sample of the experimental theatre's wares, the exhibit is hardly encouraging, though its central idea at least has a greater vitality than the routine thematic fare which so often spreads itself over the professional stage. The per-

formances of the mixed company of Negroes and whites were for the larger share to be identified more closely with purely physical activity than with considered histrionism; and the direction by the playwright, which was responsible, added further to the presentation's vitiating stridor by italicizing even its passive verbs.

HAND IN GLOVE. DECEMBER 4, 1944

A play by Charles K. Freeman and Gerald Savory, based on the latter's novel, Hughie Roddis. Produced by Arthur Edison for 40 performances in the Playhouse.

PROGRAM

JENNY	<i>Jean Bellows</i>	PURPLE CAP	<i>Almon Bruce</i>
MR. RAMSKILL	<i>George Lloyd</i>	BOWLER HAT	<i>Todd Stanton</i>
AUNTIE B.	<i>Isobel Elsom</i>	SERGEANT	<i>Robin Craven</i>
HUGHIE	<i>Skelton Knaggs</i>	CHIEF CONSTABLE	
MR. FORSYTHE	<i>St. Clair Bayfield</i>	WALLACE WIDDECOMBE	<i>Wallace Widdecombe</i>
MRS. WILLIS	<i>Viola Roache</i>	MAN FROM LONDON	
LILY WILLIS	<i>Islay Benson</i>		<i>Aubrey Mather</i>
CURLY LATHAM	<i>Victor Beecroft</i>		

SYNOPSIS: Prologue. A deserted narrow street near the Old Queens Dock, Halsey, Yorkshire, England. Winter, 1944. Act I. The kitchen in Auntie B.'s house. Early the following morning. Act II. The same. Sunday night, ten days later. (Curtain will be lowered briefly to denote the passing of two hours.) Act III. The same. The following evening.

T

HE DIVISIONS of the thriller crime drama are, again, four: the detective mystery thriller, the detective thriller minus the mystery, the mystery thriller minus the detective, and the thriller — to use the word in all cases tentatively — minus both the detective and the mystery. The Messrs. Freeman's and Savory's contribution falls into the groove of the detective thriller minus the mystery, which most often is the weakest of the four forms. If what might be the mystery is revealed to an audience in a prologue, as in this case, there seldom remains much to agitate the nervous system, unless the playwright is more than usually dexterous, which the present twain unfortunately are not. After all, if you are told that the rabbit is concealed in the silk hat's false bottom, you can not be expected to open your mouth wide in speculation and awe when the prestidigitator goes in for a lot of mumbo-jumbo and finally with a profound flourish

pulls it out. That is, save the prestidigitator be a low comedian and confine himself to burlesque, or save you be in your cups.

Furthermore, English or English-derived plays like this one which are steeped in abnormal psychology and perversion have been unloaded on our stages so often that the startle they once may have possessed has vanished, and all that remains is the impression of indifferent melodrama attemptedly concealed in some hitherto theatrically unstated species of emotional kink or degeneracy. In this instance we have already had the species stated or implied on at least two previous occasions, so little is left but the indifferent melodrama.

What the stage discloses on this Krafft-Ebing occasion is a young Cockney who is short on the amorous end and whose mental torture induced by his impotence drives him to seek sexual relief and satisfaction in murdering and slicing up the women whom he can not negotiate. In order to divert suspicion, the young man concocts evidence against an idiot youth in the house in which he is boarding, but eventually is trapped by an agent of Scotland Yard. The writing is of the conventional detective story cut, and the acting, except in the case of Aubrey Mather as the sleuth, poor as it was and downright dreadful in the particular case of one Skelton Knaggs as the idiot who resembled a cross between all the old Lon Chaney moving picture roles and a high-school dramatic society Oswald, was even further mangled by James Whale, the director, who now and then had apparently been thinking of an entirely different play manuscript.

Perhaps the only distinction I enjoy in the world of my distinguished fellows is that I am one of the very few men who do not achieve an enormous pleasure out of murder mystery and detective stories. But, like many another luminary in his own land, I have yet to be properly honored for the fact. Rather am I taken to task, albeit indirectly, by such eminent literati as W. Somerset Maugham, *et al.*, who lately have spread their enthusiasm for the tales in the public prints and have argued that their authors embrace merits

which the authors of other forms of fictional literature too often lack. All right, but I'll still take Gide, Mann and Co., including Maugham himself.

It isn't that I can't in a way understand the attraction for many men of the mystery-detective yarns, as I can similarly understand in a way the attraction for them of golf, cards, the flattery of uncritical women, and other such time-killers and anodynes. But time seems personally to be so fast-moving and immensely valuable and so fertile in other possibilities that to dissipate it on the literary or dramatic equivalents of tick-tack-toe is something that skips my comprehension.

Nor can I appreciate the alleged exceptional escape attributes of the general run of mystery stories and plays. The escape they offer is on an amateur par with that of a jail with licorice candy window bars. They call upon and gratify not the imagination, which is the only real avenue of intelligent escape, but merely the guessing faculties. And they amount at bottom only to a repetition of one's father's old game of asking one to guess which hand he was holding something in, a sport designed for the diversion and rapt interest of very young children and dogs. The end sum of the stories and plays, it seems to me, is a non-alcoholic Harvey.

Hand In Glove marked the fifty-sixth failure out of sixty-three detective or mystery exhibits produced in the period hereinbefore noted.

A BELL FOR ADANO. DECEMBER 6, 1944

A dramatization of the John Hersey novel by Paul Osborn. Produced by Leland Hayward for a beyond the season's run in the Cort Theatre.

PROGRAM

MAJOR VICTOR JOPPOLO	Fredric March	CORPORAL CHUCK SCHULTZ, M.P.	Fred Barton
SERGEANT LEONARD BORTH, M.P.	Everett Sloane	COLONEL GEORGE MIDDLETON	Harry Selby
GOVANNI ZITO	Gilbert Mack	BELLANCO	Michael Vallon
GUISEPPE RIBAUDO	Tito Vuolo	D'ARPA	Mario Badolati
CACOPARDO	Silvio Minciotti	SPINNATO	Doreen McLean
CRAXI	Joe Verdi	PIETRO AFRONTI	Albert Raymo
FATHER PENSOVECCHIO	Leon Rothier	CARLO ERBA	Charles Mayer
MARCHERITA	Miriam Goldine	GOVANNI BASILE	J. Scott Smart
CARMELINA	Alma Ross	MAYOR NASTA	Rolfe Sedan
LAURA SOFIA	Florence Aquino	JOE POLLOCK, M.P.	Clark Poth
GARGANO	Harold J. Stone	TOMASINO	Alexander Granach
TINA	Margo	Lt. LIVINGSTON, U. S. NAVY	Phil Arthur
CAPTAIN PURVIS	Bruce MacFarlane	BILL MUNROE, M.P.	Rex King
SERGEANT FRANK TRAPANI, M.P.	Jack Arnold		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. July, 1943. Midday. Scene 2. Five days later. Scene 3. Two days later. Act II. Scene 1. A few days later. Late afternoon. Scene 2. A week later. Early morning. Act III. Scene 1. A few days later. Morning. Scene 2. Some hours later. Late afternoon.

IT HAS BEEN rare that the dramatization of a novel has not been accompanied by the familiar complaint that the restrictions of the stage have operated to its disadvantage, and that the play was therefore less satisfactory than the book from which it was derived. Not only the critics but often the playwrights themselves have indulged in the lament. Mr. Osborn still remains no exception. In an article published in the *New York Times* before his play opened, he wistfully indicated what he had been driven to leave out of it and re-

signed himself to the necessity allegedly imposed upon him. It is true that he omitted from his dramatization a number of the elements of the novel, but it is happily not true that the omissions have materially damaged his play. He has done a very satisfactory job. It is also and furthermore hardly true that, capable as he is, he might not, had he wished, incorporated some of the omissions if his capability as a dramatist had been greater.

There is altogether too much apology for the stage in matters like this. The stage has certain restrictions, granted; but they are in no wise so severe as the lesser dramatists elect for their personal comfort and self-protection to make out. The novel has seldom given us a more complete picture of character and episode than *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, or than *The Cherry Orchard* or *The Three Sisters*, or than *Strange Interlude* or *Mourning Becomes Electra*. The authors of at least three of these successfully waved aside the alleged stage restriction of time, as other dramatists of eminence have successfully waved aside all kinds of other hypothetical restrictions. The promiscuous allegation of such restrictions proves, when analyzed and closely investigated, to be generally hollow; and no better way to appreciate the fact is to scrutinize the motion pictures, whose advocates constantly champion for their ability to do things that the stage can not.

Sitting some time ago over the cheese rabbits with the accomplished film director, Mr. Rouben Mamoulian, the conversation turned, surprisingly enough, to these motion pictures, commonly designated by physicians of culture as the venereal disease of the arts. I say surprisingly enough because Mr. Mamoulian is also, despite *Sadie Thompson*, an at times accomplished stage director who admires and respects the theatre, so naturally I did not expect it. "The stage," he nevertheless began, "has limitations that the pictures readily conquer. For one example, the stage could not possibly show anything like the sweep of distance, the expanse of scene, that the pictures can."

"No?" I ventured. "Did you ever happen to see or hear of a spectacle called *The Magic Doll*, produced in the thea-

tre years before the movies were invented? It showed a child lost in an impenetrable forest. Gradually, as the child gropingly moved through it, the trees parted, closed in again, parted and closed in again endlessly, tier upon tier. The effect was of trees, trees, trees for miles. Have the pictures, with the factual outdoors at their disposal, ever surpassed that?"

"I guess no," allowed Mr. Mamoulian.

"But what about coloring?" he presently asked. "Can the stage equal the brilliant coloring made possible by the invention of the Technicolor process?"

"It can not only equal it but, to any sensitive eye, outdo it," I replied, in a suitably modulated voice lest the rabbits be blown off the table.

"How come?" bade my guest, in his best drawing-room Armenian.

"Technicolor has never so far approached the duplication of beauty that has been offered by the dazzling Alma Tadema scenic designs painted by the Harkers, or by the sets Joseph Urban did for the old Ziegfeld *Follies*, or by the brilliant *Hamlet* setting of Gordon Craig, or by the costumes done by Miles White for *The Pirate* and *Early To Bed*, or by a score of other such stage eye-tonics."

"I think, rabbit or no rabbit, I'll turn from beer to Scotch," said Mr. Mamoulian.

"Me, too," said I, not to be outdone by my guest's drawing-room Armenian, in my best drawing-room Scotch.

"But don't you think that the brilliant coloring made possible by Technicolor has added to the artistic progress of the screen?" bade my friend.

"I have seen a Madonna on the screen who, under the brilliantly artistic Technicolor process which you mention, looked for all the world as if she were on her way to a Mardi Gras ball. Incidentally — and forgive me for talking so much, but I can smell good material for *The Theatre Book Of The Year, 1944-45* in all this, or maybe it's only the rabbits — incidentally, in all the great Madonnas in history's greatest paintings have you ever seen *one* done in similar brilliant hues?"

"No," said Mr. Mamoulian, "and another Scotch please, double."

"But what of outdoor scenes?" my friend continued. "And where is that lazy waiter?"

"The trouble with Nature," I remarked, "is that it is sometimes too much like Nature," meanwhile fearing that I had probably cabbaged the profundity from Wilde, Whistler, or some other such fancy talker. "Technicolor, except in very rare instances, duplicates Nature so closely that it paradoxically doesn't seem real, just as the wax fruit on the mantel in a Victorian house never because of its too-realness seemed real."

"But," at length protested my patient friend, "you can't deny that the screen can show things in general that the stage can not."

"For example, *mon cher?*" I inquired. "And, captain, tell that snail-paced baboon of a waiter to hurry up or we'll both die of thirst!"

"For example," responded *mon cher*, "can the stage show such things as a railroad locomotive rushing headlong at the audience, or a raging forest fire, or a realistic wreck at sea, or a fire engine galloping to a fire, or an automobile racing at top speed, or anything else like that?"

"Certainly," vouchsafed your mastermind. "The stage has showed everything you speak of, and much more. Furthermore, it has showed it with a very high degree of realism. Langdon McCormick showed a railroad locomotive rushing headlong toward the audience in *The Ninety and Nine*, a raging forest fire in *The Storm*, and a wreck at sea in *Shipwrecked*. A fire engine on the gallop was the big feature of Lee Arthur's *The Still Alarm*, and Lincoln J. Carter's *Bedford's Hope* which, incidentally, was the first play I ever reviewed, had an automobile racing at top speed that would have knocked your eye out."

"All right," allowed my still patient friend, "but aside from such purely spectacular things, what of the other virtues of the screen in being able to show details that are beyond the scope of the dramatic stage? Take, for instance, some such play as *Life With Father*. The screen, when it

eventually gets there, can embroider it with countless details that the stage can't: Father in full regalia parading Fifth Avenue, the scene in the church, the horses and carriages of the period, shots of the New York of the time, etc., etc."

"The very virtue of the stage is that it doesn't show such details," observed your elocutionist. "The drama wisely dismisses all such items as irrelevant and immaterial. The screen simply clutters itself up with them by way of supplying to the audience what the film people think it can not sufficiently imagine, like a child drawing a picture of a cow and labeling it a cow for extra safe measure. The drama is a process of selection. The screen is a process of over-embellishment. More Scotch, waiter."

"Yet the screen, whether they are important or not, has, you will admit, devised various camera tricks that are most amusing and that contribute to original entertainment," pursued the amiable Mr. Mamoulian.

"Go on, please," pursued the amiable Mr. Nathan.

"Well, for a couple of pointed illustrations, the trick of making a person invisible or of making a man disappear suddenly into space, as in the *Topper* pictures."

"That was done, and most effectively, years before in, respectively, Roland West's melodrama, *The Unknown Purple*, and, years still before that, in Charles H. Yale's famous old spectacle, *The Devil's Auction*."

The eye of my friend achieved a determined gleam. "Now don't try to tell me," he said, "that the screen can't provide a much more beautiful, actual view of, say, Venice, or the Orient, or the countries of the Caribbean than the artificial scenery of the stage!"

"I fear," said I, "that once again I shall have to spoil the taste of your Scotch for you. Venice was never half so beautiful as the Venice that Erik Charell showed on the stage of *Casanova*. The Orient was never one-third so fascinating as it was on the stage of either *Kismet* or *Mecca*. And Martinique, for example, never in actuality approached even distantly the beauty of Martinique in George Jenkins' lovely backgrounds for *Early To Bed*. Besides, anyone who has

ever been to Venice, the Orient or Martinique knows they smell like hell, and you can't smell them on the stage."

"Nor on the screen!" triumphantly exclaimed my friend.

"Point one-half of one for the defence," magnanimously allowed his friend.

"In a picture about Queen Christina which I did some years ago with Greta Garbo," Mr. M. continued, "I think I managed something that the stage would find rather difficult. At the very end of the picture, when Christina has lost her love and all, you may recall that I showed Garbo standing alone in the prow of a vessel. The only thing visible about her was her face and that pale face, which the lights were centered upon and the sad features of which remained immobile, wrought a spell on audiences that they could not forget."

"The stage," answered this persistent bore, "long before managed many such things quite as effectively. Whoever that saw the pale face of Bernhardt immobile on the pillow of Camille's death-bed at the play's end has been able to forget it? Or the pale, immobile face of Eleonora Duse, with the lights similarly playing upon it, at the end of not only that same play but also — surely also — of *Cosi Sia*? Or the face of any actress who ever played Flavia in *The Prisoner Of Zenda*, illuminated by the moonlight on the terrace of the castle and finding surcease in her loneliness with the cry, 'If love were all!' And, besides, do you honestly believe, my friend, that the spell you speak of in the picture you mention would have been wrought upon movie audiences if, instead of it being Garbo's face they saw, it had been Edna May Oliver's or ZaSu Pitts'?"

"This Scotch seems a little weak," said my friend. "I think I need some brandy."

"With soda?" I inquired.

"Without soda!" he yelled.

"But the screen in its time," Mr. M. presently resumed, "has surely produced some cinema masterpieces: *The Birth of a Nation*, *Intolerance*, *Hearts of the World*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* in its earlier years; such pictures as *The Informer* in its more recent."

"Even movie audiences who in later years have seen those earlier masterpieces, Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, *Intolerance* and *Hearts of the World*, along with the European *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, have derisively laughed themselves sick at them. I know, because I was there. As for *The Informer*, it is certainly better than the great majority of pictures but there are any number of things in it that would make theatre audiences laugh themselves sick in turn. For a single example, the women in the bordello scene all wearing hats. In addition, even at its best it amounted to little more than the obvious kind of melodrama that occupies an inferior place on the dramatic stage."

"If movie audiences now laugh at the old Griffith pictures," objected our friend, "it doesn't prove that they weren't once good, does it?"

"Did you ever," your Nuisance Value asked, "hear any theatre audiences laugh loudly at the centuries-old *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* or, let's say, a play of much the same Griffith period like Shaw's *Saint Joan* when it has been subsequently reshown, even badly?"

"I may simply reply," said Mr. M., "that the screen, unlike the drama, is a young art, still in its infancy."

"The drama was also once in its infancy," I reminded, "and don't forget that while in that infancy it produced, long years before the birth of Christ, some of the world's still enduring masterpieces."

"But," howled my friend, "can't the screen do *anything*?"

"Yes," I was happy to reply, "there are some things it can do, and do handsomely. It can in its news-reels show remarkable happenings that the stage can't. It can show pie-throwing slapstick comedy very efficiently, often almost as efficiently as the stage. It can make women seem infinitely more attractive than they are with the aid of stand-ins' legs, hands, feet and whatnot cleverly substituted for the women's defective own. It can show scenes of battle more fully and realistically than the stage. It can, by virtue of film cutting and other tricks, make an actor or actress of a man or woman who can't act. It can at times make a million dollars when the theatre can make only fifty thousand or less. It

can bring fame, such as it is, to persons who in the theatre couldn't possibly rise higher than stage extras, one-performance playwrights, or assistant box-office treasurers. It can transport countless morons, whom the theatre would only depress, to another and to them glorious sphere. It can make clerks and shopgirls dress better. It can show an octopus on the sea's bottom winding its tentacles around Buster Crabbe, which the stage can't and certainly wouldn't if it could. It can do a lot of such things, and more."

"Waiter!" screamed Mr. Mamoulian; "if you don't throw this man out, he'll drive me crazy! And, meanwhile, half a dozen aspirins, if you please."

In the specific case of the dramatized novel, the self-imposed duty of the dramatic critic in expatiating at length on what the playwright has left out and in lamenting the omissions more or less extendedly, while occasionally justified, is at times as gratuitous as would be a literary critic's lament, on reviewing the novel, that it did not contain photographs of Ethel Barrymore, Mady Christians and Leo G. Carroll, several colored drawings by Stewart Chaney giving an idea of the setting, and a phonograph recording of the speaking voices of the central characters.

The old notion that any novel which was dramatized was something of a sacred masterpiece is now, however, gradually disappearing from the critical credo. And it is thus that we here welcomely have had Osborn's play taken largely on its own and without the previous sobs and wails that a few things have been deleted from the book. That they have been deleted and that in the book they were effective is true. But that the deletion, except in one particular, weakens and damages his play is not, as almost everyone has agreed.

Hersey's theme of an AMG major who brings the tenets of American democracy to a small Fascist town in Italy has been transferred to the stage with quite as much force and eloquence as Hersey himself managed, and the play, while here and there on its own terms somewhat over-melodramatized, provides a theatrical evening of considerable vitality. That it is in essence and in execution of hokum all compact is in this instance not greatly to be held against it. You

either have the hokum or you have no play or, for that matter, no novel. Moreover, the sure-fire of both book and play is not all arbitrary; it is often honest and deep in the materials.

There may be moments in the exhibit when the constriction of the action to one setting, the former office of the mayor in the town's City Hall, operates toward a crowding of Yankee Doodle episode that heightens the effect of the little town having been taken over and being supervised by George M. Cohan, with an American flag in his hand. Yet for many more moments the novelist's probity, echoed by the playwright, rescues the stage from what in other days might have been mere grand food for the gallery gods. And the final moment with the bell of democracy ringing out in the theatre, though also paraphrased hokum as would have delighted the souls of the author and producer of *The Heart Of Maryland*, is, when one comes right down to theatrical fact, genuinely galvanizing.

Although Fredric March's Major Joppolo left something to be desired, most of the rest of the company were first-rate. And the direction by H. C. Potter and the Motley physical production were equally so.

THE SEVEN LIVELY ARTS

DECEMBER 7, 1944

A revue with songs and lyrics by Cole Porter and sketches by Moss Hart, George S. Kaufman, Charles Sherman, and Joseph Schrank. Produced by Billy Rose for 182 performances in the Ziegfeld Theatre.

PRINCIPALS

Beatrice Lillie, Bert Lahr, Benny Goodman, Alicia Markova, Anton Dolin, Doc Rockwell, Albert Carroll, William Tabbert, Nan Wynn, Dolores Gray, Mary Roche, Jere McMahon, and Dennie Moore.

TO SAY THAT Billy Rose is the foremost showman in the present American theatre isn't entirely fair to him. There has come to be something about the word "showman" that is not especially complimentary. Too often it is used to describe a man who successfully puts over on the public an oversized, mild monkey out of some South American public park zoo as a ferocious, man-eating orang-outang that in its day has dined off at least two dozen Ecuadorian vice-presidents. Or one who has produced a show that, if there were any justice in the world, would go to the storehouse by Saturday night but which he manipulates into a big box-office success by means closely identified in other days with the sale of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Rose is a showman of different stripe. He does not practise his virtuosity on hypothetical orang-outangs or the selling of theatrical bridges. His showmanship consists rather in giving the people something considerably bigger and better in its particular line than most other producers give them, and then going to the wholly unnecessary trouble and expense of selling it to them with an advertising ballyhoo that puts Barnum and even Darryl Zanuck to shame. If he has a show that calls, even before it opens, for several extra men in the box-office to handle the crowds

stampeding to buy tickets, does he beamingly retire to his arm-chair and let things go at that? Not Billy. He forthwith enters upon a publicity campaign more relevant to an abject failure and, by the time he is through, there is nothing left for those who have been woefully disappointed in not being able to get seats but craftily induced *hara-kiri*.

This latest of the Rose ventures was a post-Ziegfeld show housed in the remodeled and handsome Ziegfeld Theatre, which Billy bought for himself as an extra trinket for a minor outlay of some 700,000 dollars. As if the show, which in large part was a dandy, and the theatre, which is wholly a dandy, were not enough for the first-night audience, he moreover for double measure installed a Salvador Dali art gallery, which was made available to all subsequent customers, and free vintage champagne served by twenty-eight white-gloved bartenders and butlers, which was not. But the show no more needed champagne for its appreciation than his *Carmen Jones* needed gin or marijuana.

Handsomely staged and lighted by Hassard Short and no less handsomely set and costumed by, respectively, Norman Bel Geddes and Valentina and Mary Grant, the exhibit's highlights were the following:

Item. A hilarious sketch by Moss Hart in which Beatrice Lillie, the show's outstanding feature, played an English lady of title trying to make American doughboys in an English canteen feel at home by speaking to them in what she believed to be the current American lingo, most of it startling the boys out of their wits with its sexual double entendre.

Item. Nan Wynn and Mary Roche, two girls who would have pleased Ziegfeld's eye and who sang fetchingly.

Item. Beatrice Lillie in another Hart sketch standing in line at a box-office to buy a seat for a ballet the name of which she could not remember but thought was "S. Hurok."

Item. Bert Lahr, dressed as an English Admiral on the deck of an old battleship, singing a drinking song which made such a realistic impression upon him that he wound up dead drunk.

Item. Beatrice Lillie's several wittily risqué ditties.

Item. A derisive finale to the first act, titled "Billy Rose Buys The Metropolitan Opera House," which showed what might befall that institution if Billy were to get hold of it.

Item. A ballet number by Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin.

Item. A jam session led by Benny Goodman.

Item. A jocund sketch, "Local Boy Makes Good," by George S. Kaufman, based on the lofty independence of stage-hands.

Item. The most beautiful girls seen on the local stage in some time.

Among the relatively few lowlights were these:

Item. Doc Rockwell's stale physiology lecture, which should never have been exhumed.

Item. A sketch by Hart lampooning the drama critics, including the present commentator, which was too strainingly polite and which accordingly went to pieces at the finish, whereas a more hearty impudence and vulgarity might have made it amusing.

Item. A poor sketch, "The Great Man Speaks," by Charles Sherman, dealing with the vanity of the actor, Orson Welles.

Item. Rockwell's running commentary on the show, written by Ben Hecht, which was both obvious and sub-juvenile.

SPOOK SCANDALS. DECEMBER 8, 1944

A bill of 3 one-act plays plus song and dance, the music and lyrics by Sergio De Karlo. Produced by the Michael Todd Midnight Players for 2 performances in the President Theatre.

PLAYERS

Paul Haakon, Raul and Eva Reyes, Jerry Sylvon, Sergio De Karlo, Al Henderson, Don De Leo, Gedda Perry, Dean Myles, Mila Niemi, Kendal Bryson, Arthur Gondra, John Conray, Janet Gaylord, John Robinson, and Eddy Grove.

THE PLAYS, of the so-called horror species, were *Gobi Curse*, by Arthur Gondra, *The Coffin Room*, by Al Henderson, and *The Blind Monster*, by Jerry Sylvon, who organized the show, which sought cutely to fit the over-all *Spook Scandals* title by being produced at midnight. The Paris Grand Guignol, which achieved its reputation over many years through such horror exhibits, presented its bills at 8:45 in the evening, which for the assimilation of spectacles involving the pouring of carbolic acid on a woman's face and the inoculation of a man with cholera morbus germs was not only a considerably less horrible hour but which commodiously permitted the sufferers thereafter to acquire an antidote at the Bal Tabarin and like clinics.

The plays in this amateurish imitation of the little theatre in the Rue Chaptal were, save in one of the three cases, horrible only in their total lack of fresh imagination and dramatic competence, the exception being an appropriation of the Guignol's well-known vitriol vignette, *Kiss In The Dark*, produced locally years ago by the Holbrook Blinn players in the old Princess Theatre, and even that was spoiled in the rewriting. The one really frightening thing on the bill was the show's song and dance business, which rivalled in horror anything ever displayed at the Guignol.

Scrutinizing the exhibit on the opening night, Michael Todd, who put up the money for the acting group, shuddered in appropriate terror, requested the reviewers "to forget the whole thing," and withdrew the infliction from the stage on the following night.

DARK HAMMOCK. DECEMBER 11, 1944

A melodrama by Mary Orr and Reginald Denham. Produced by Meyer Davis and Sam H. Grisman for 2 performances in the Forrest Theatre.

PROGRAM

CORAL PLATT	Mary Orr	GOLDIE	Alonzo Bosan
MARVIN PLATT		ANDREW JACKSON SPARKS	
	Charles McClelland		Arthur Hunnicutt
DOC BUNNELL	Scott Moore	FLORENCE McDAVID	Elissa Landi
CARLOS ANTUNA	James Ganon	AMELIA COOP	Mary Wickes
BELLE	Mabel D. Bergen	BUTCH SMITH	Alan Dreeben

SYNOPSIS: Act I. June, early evening. Act II. Scene 1. Noon, the following day. Scene 2. Evening, three days later. Act III. Scene 1. Late afternoon, one month later. Scene 2. That night.

Scene. Marvin Platt's farmstead, known as "Dark Hammock" on the Kissimee Prairie, Florida.

Time. 1910.

THE AUTHORS' horticultural pursuits, which got under way last season with *Wallflower*, progressed with misfortune to this peculiar little jimson, or stinkweed. The weed in question is a growth dramatically indigenous to English moors and the American bayou country, as well as to any other soil and climate which the leading female character, brought up in a less darksome milieu, can not tolerate. Her antipathy to her surroundings, augmented by the presence of her husband who exercises upon her much the same effect as the soil and climate, along with the incidental circumstance that she is amorously inclined toward a younger man, usually with black curly hair, located elsewhere, contrives in all cases to induce in her thoughts of murder, and to induce in the audience thoughts of exactly the same kind.

The Orr-Denham plant differs from most of the other specimens of its genre in only one particular: it is much worse. Not only does it have recourse to the old business of

the slowly administered poison and the eventual switching of the glasses that does the would-be murderer in, but it presents in its female sleuth a character so slow-witted and dumb that, in view of the play's snail-pace movement, it is evident that she believes the word "clue" is spelled with a *g*.

The dramaturgy, to boot, is as palsied as the package's materials. The sleuth, for example, at one point in the proceedings exclaims, "I can always remember things better when I put them down," and thereupon seats herself at a table, takes out a notebook and pencil and writes down at great length, while repeating aloud what she writes, everything with which the audience is already perfectly familiar, and profoundly bored. Whenever, furthermore, the sleuth and her woman assistant peer at or move a piece of furniture the guilty heroine lets out a shriek of protest lest they discover a trapdoor underneath or the hidden poison, with the consequent feeling that the Hawkshaw and her assistant will momentarily remove their metaphorical whiskers and proclaim themselves to be Olsen and Johnson.

But even that is not the worst of it. Discovering the jug of liquid phosphorus with which the husband-poisoning is being negotiated, the lady sleuth bids her auxiliary to put out all the lights and thus allows the jug to betray its greenish-blue hue, whereupon she triumphantly exclaims, "See!" The audience, unfortunately, has anticipated her triumph fully an hour before, since the guilty heroine has been whittling off enough sulphur from matches to start a couple of new white springs in West Virginia. And the laborious manner in which the sleuth leaves the evidence of her suspicion lying about for its due discovery by the guilty party is worthy of the old musical comedy book in which the Sherlock went around confidentially whispering to all the suspects, "I'm a detective!"

Things were hardly improved by casting the role of the mortally ill husband with a ruddy, powerful, two-hundred-pound actor who had previously played cowboy roles, by an actress in the sleuth's role who frequently mumbled her lines as if she were rehearsing the part to herself, and by

the routine waddling, fat colored actress in the role of a servant who laughed up and down the scale after each of her speeches.

The untoward incident opened on Monday night and closed on Tuesday night, and registered the fifty-seventh failure out of sixty-four such presentations.

LITTLE WOMEN. DECEMBER 12, 1944

A revival of Marian De Forest's dramatization of the Louisa May Alcott novel. Produced by Eddie Dowling for a limited engagement of 23 performances at the City Center Theatre.

PROGRAM

JO	Mary Welch	LAURIE	John Ruth
MEG	Margot Stevenson	MR. LAURENCE	Harrison Dowd
AMY	Susana Garnett	AUNT MARCH	Grace Mills
BETH	Frances Reid	MR. MARCH	David Lewis
MRS. MARCH	Velma Royton	PROFESSOR BHAER	
HANNAH	Valerie Valaire		Herbert Berghof
JOHN BROOKE	Clark Williams		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *The sitting room of the March home in Concord, Mass. An afternoon in December, 1863.* Act II. Scene 1. *The same, three months later. Morning, March, 1864.* Scene 2. *The same, six months later. Late afternoon, September, 1864.* Act III. Scene 1. *The same, two and one-half years later. Scene 2. The same, eighteen months later. An afternoon in October, 1868.*

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FIRST SHOWN locally thirty-three years ago and last seen thirteen ago, the dramatization marked yet still another in the series of reproductions and revivals to which Mayor La Guardia's theatrical project seems to be ferociously committed. If the policy, which is to be viewed with increasingly narrowed eyes, is to be continued, the City Center could, however, hardly do better than to leave the revivals in the hands of Mr. Dowling and Jessie Royce Landis, his present director, at least judging from this example of their work. It was the most efficient job that the house has displayed. By virtue of its proficiency the venerable minor American classic took on a surprising freshness and a measure of unaccustomed life and provided an amiable theatrical evening. Miss Landis deftly directed the play out of much of its former too thick sentiment and by intelligent cutting lent to its writing a needed lift. Here and there her

George Abbott training caused her to overspeed the action, but by and large she did wonders in blowing off the play's shelf-dust and in giving it a semblance of stage modernity.

As the tom-boy Jo, a newcomer named Mary Welch was excellent, and both Margot Stevenson and Susana Garnett served the roles of Meg and Amy nicely, albeit the latter occasionally betrayed the fact that someone had told her she looked like a young Billie Burke and was inclined to pattern herself after her idol. Frances Reid was haplessly not the actress for the role of the delicate Beth, and her fixed broad grin was less appropriate to the dying daughter of the March household than to a healthy chorus girl angling for a prospect sitting down front. The others, notably Velma Ryon as the mother and Herbert Berghof as the professor, were, however, very good.

Little Women, believe it or not, is, in short, still serviceable theatre, and a felicitous journey out of the hard-boiled present into the lace-valentine yesterday. The argument that it is overly sentimental is true. But it could not well be otherwise, since it happens to deal with overly sentimental people. As soundly argue that *The Lower Depths* is overly cynical.

There are some people, critics among them, who insist upon a villain in even something like *Ode To A Nightingale*.

DEAR RUTH. DECEMBER 13, 1944

A farce-comedy by Norman Krasna. Produced by Joseph M. Hyman and Bernard Hart for a far beyond the season run in the Henry Miller Theatre.

PROGRAM

DORA	Pauline Myers	ALBERT KUMMER
MRS. EDITH WILKINS	Phyllis Povah	Bartlett Robinson
MIRIAM WILKINS	Lenore Lonergan	MARTHA SEAWRIGHT Kay Coulter
JUDGE HARRY WILKINS	Howard Smith	SGT. CHUCK VINCENT Richard McCracken
RUTH WILKINS	Virginia Gilmore	HAROLD KOBBERMEYER Peter Dunn
L.T. WILLIAM SEAWRIGHT	John Dall	

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. Saturday morning. Scene 2. Same day. 5:30 p.m. Scene 3. Sunday morning. 1:30 a.m. Act II. Scene 1. Sunday morning. 10:00 a.m. Scene 2. Same day. Noon. Scene 3. Same day. 4:00 p.m.

The setting is the living-room of the Wilkins home, New York City, in the late summer of 1944.

THIS IS A synthetic farce-comedy compounded of long familiar materials, including some of the jokes, which by virtue of some initiated editing and staging on the part of Moss Hart amounts in the aggregate to amusing Broadway theatrical fare. It is not often that something which in its original form must have been little more than a Hollywood motion picture script is made into a good show, but Hart has managed, at least for a share of the evening, to turn the trick.

Consider the plot scheme which, in story form, magazine editors have been turning down for the last thirty years: the young girl who sends loving letters to a strange man signed with her older sister's name and the eventual appearance of the recipient, in this case put into an Army flier's uni-

form, to claim his hypothetical admirer. There is surely little in that to bounce one out of one's seat. Turn to some of the humor: radio cracks about Frank Sinatra, Felix Frankfurter, *et al.*, lines like "I poured my heart out" — "Who's going to pour it back?", and, among other items, the dropping of a plate of spaghetti on someone's clothes, the drinking of a big glass of whiskey by a female stripling, and the blowing of tobacco smoke into a character's face followed by the latter's choking. There is certainly also little there to split anyone's sides. Turn then to some of the characters: the precocious brat out of *Junior Miss*, etc., etc., the patient paterfamilias, the solicitous, fluttery materfamilias, the heroic young aviator, the stodgy fiancé of the heroine, and so on. Nothing there either to convulse the consumer. And turn finally to a number of other such ingredients as, once again, the colored servant girl who laughs uproariously on her every exit, the character who elaborately insists she is sober and then imagines that an inanimate object is talking to her, and the dimwit who has to have jokes explained to him. Hardly the sort of materials to galvanize the interest. Yet it remains that the commodity on the whole has been finagled by Hart into one of those jobs that the popular theatre of Broadway knows so well how to do and one which is periodically gagged up so artfully, sentimentalized so professionally, maneuvered in its physical aspects so ably, and cast so intelligently that it amounts in sufficient part to lively entertainment. As anything critically reputable it is nil. But as vaudeville with some foxy observation of character it passes nicely.

Its first-night audience, operating on its own, would in all possibility have gone a long way toward making even something like *Down To Miami* a stunning box-office success. Made up in ample part of friends of the author, director and producers, and including many people from the author's and other Hollywood movie lots, its enthusiasm went into action even before the show started. And when at length the curtain rose and disclosed a perfectly conventional set of scenery on an empty stage the enthusiasm was expressed in such thunderous applause as has not been

heard in a theatre — if history is correct — since the opening of Aristophanes' *The Frogs*.

Nothing thereafter could stem the audience's frantic admiration. The mere mention of Henry Stimson's name drove it crazy with mirth, and the menu phrase "eggs lilac" had it rolling in the aisles. A line like "How did you sleep?" followed by "Like a top; spun around all night" caused a veritable explosion. A sentimental description of the young aviator hero as the sweet kind of fellow who loves to ride in the Subway and on the tops of Fifth Avenue buses and wants to eat at the Automat induced a flood of wistful tears and nose-blowings. And a scene in which the maid delivered an oversized package of Crackerjack into the living room literally brought down the house.

To repeat, there is, however, enough of another kind of humor to make one laugh without feeling too ashamed of one's self.

LAFFING ROOM ONLY! DECEMBER 23, 1944

A show with book by Olsen and Johnson and Eugene Conrad, music and lyrics by Burton Lane. Produced by the Shuberts and Olsen and Johnson for a beyond the season run in the Winter Garden.

PRINCIPALS

Olsen and Johnson, Frank Libuse, Betty Garrett, Mata and Hari, Willie West and McGinty, Ethel Owen, William Archibald, Kathryn Lee, Pat Brewster, Ida James, Margot Brander, Penny Edwards, Frances Henderson, and Lou Wills, Jr.

THE LATEST in the series of Olsen-Johnson rumpuses, like its predecessors *Hellzapoppin* and *Sons o' Fun*, successfully pursues the theory that there is money in catering to the many people who confuse personal embarrassment and physical discomfort with pleasure. George C. Tilyou discovered the fact many years ago and made a fortune out of his Steeplechase Parks, which endlessly gratified their customers by upsetting them in revolving barrels, splitting their trousers on bumpy slides, blowing their skirts up over their heads, and spinning them off turntables onto the hard floor. By way of playing doubly safe, the Messrs. Olsen and Johnson have augmented the Tilyou technique with an amount of noise which is guaranteed to further the customers' delight by cracking their eardrums and which lends to the show in general the aspect of Hallowe'en in a cannon works. And to play triply safe they have borrowed from the Frankie Hyers-Pat Harrington night club in West Fifty-second Street that institution's basic philosophy, to wit, that customers seem not only to relish having full soup plates dumped upon their heads but to be inordinately tickled by being verbally insulted while the aforesaid dumping is in operation.

That there may be no delay in pleasing their customers, the Messrs. O. and J. set things into motion twenty minutes

before their first curtain rises. Actors rush up and down the aisles shooting off pistols, leaky beer bottles are passed around and spilled upon laps, large bologna sausages are tossed about the auditorium, women stooges crawl over one's legs and yell at the tops of their lungs, extras parade in the aisles and suddenly let out indignant howls alleging that members of the audience have, as the vulgarity goes, "goosed" them, blinding spotlights are focused upon the customers' eyes, exploding cameras are poked at their noses, and candy filled with sawdust is dispensed right and left. When at length the audience is thus made happy beyond all bounds, the overture gets under way, with the conductor periodically turning around and loudly ordering the happy folk to "shut their traps" and behave themselves. And the rest of the evening consists largely in overjoying them no end by throwing bricks at them from the stage, causing objects to be dropped upon them from the balcony, having actors wander up and down the aisles and fall over them, and otherwise treating them as if they were up for membership in a leper colony.

During the few relatively quieter moments, magnanimously inserted into the show to allow the audience to catch its breath, the stage and auditorium are given over to such business as a boy choir rendering "Silent Night" and at its conclusion firing off revolvers, such jokes as "It is very eerie on this train" with the witty rejoinder, "But this is the Union Pacific," such burlesque mementos as the act in which a man indignant at someone else chokes an innocent bystander, such screams as a strip-teaser finally revealing herself in long woolen underwear, such refined topical humor as a woman made up to resemble Eleanor Roosevelt and crossing the stage at ten-minute intervals with her teeth flashed at the audience, and such piquant invention as a man in one of the boxes proclaiming in the darkened theatre that he is going to shoot the rat who invaded his home and who, when the lights go up again after a pistol shot, is beheld holding aloft a stuffed rodent.

There is no end to the delicate drollery. A man beplastered as a piece of living statuary in the pose of Rodin's

"Thinker" and displayed in the early part of the evening seated at the right side of the stage is shown later on seated on a privy. Shortly afterward the Willie West and McGinty carpenter act offers as its climax the spectacle of Mr. West hurrying into another privy. A sailor and soldier then rush around the auditorium in brassières, ladies' pants and girdles. Mr. Olsen meanwhile orders a whiskey and soda over a telephone and the instrument squirts it into his face. He then orders coffee and the instrument squirts it into his face. Follows a scene in which three men garbed as Russian soldiers and preparing to shoot a spy find their rubber rifle barrels drooping, only to observe them rising stiffly when a scantily dressed woman interposes herself between them and her spy lover. An actor appears in the aisle holding several rabbits and shouts that he is looking for Harvey. "Who'll take these rabbits off my hands?" he yells. From the balcony comes the yell, "I will!" "And who are you?" yells the first man. "I. J. Fox" yells back the voice in the balcony. A girl is brought on seated in a bubble bath. Mr. Johnson inquires, "Who blows your bubbles for you?" whereupon a man sticks his head out of the tub and grimaces, "Busy little bee, ain't I?" Mr. Olsen then chases a fat actor mimicking a homosexual off the stage with the remark, "Not you for me!" Mr. Olsen exits and reappears clad in his underdrawers. A man says that he wants to buy a bed. Mr. Olsen says that he will show him one, opens a large slot in the scenery, and hauls out a bed containing a man and woman cuddling. An actor made up as Herbert Hoover sits under a sign lettered "The Forgotten Man." Another actor made up as Thomas Dewey comes on and sits next to him. A Scot enters a door bearing the sign "Ladies' Room." He is kicked out. "I thought it said 'Ladies' Room,'" he protests.

At the conclusion of the performance a midget scurries around the rear promenade biting people in the legs.

SOPHIE. DECEMBER 25, 1944

A comedy by George Ross and Rose C. Feld, based upon the latter's Sophie Halenczik, American stories. Produced by Meyer Davis and George Ross for 9 performances in the Playhouse.

PROGRAM

ANNIE HALENCZIK	Ann Shepherd	IRENE HALENCZIK	Donna Keath
ERNEST HOPKINS	Will Geer	MRS. SCUDDER	Doris Rich
TOM BLANCHARD	Richard Deane	CAPT. THORNTON SCUDDER	Ronald Alexander
CHET BLANCHARD	John McGovern	MARGE NELSON	Marguerite Clifton
FRANKIE HALENCZIK	Donald Buka	ANTON HALENCZIK	Louis Sorin
SOPHIE HALENCZIK	Katina Paxinou	ELSIE	Eda Reiss Merin
GEORGE ODANOS	John Harmon	JOEY	Jerry Boyar
MR. PARKER	Kurt Richards		

SYNOPSIS: The home of Sophie Halenczik, R.F.D. 4, Ridgetown, Conn. Act I. Scene 1. Mid-June. Scene 2. Ten days later. Act II. Scene 1. A month later. Scene 2. The following Saturday. Act III. The next morning.

FALLING INTO the catalogue of so-called folk plays — this one dealing with a family of Czechs quartered in Connecticut — the exhibit is even less successful in its purpose than other such folk plays, disclosed locally in recent seasons, as *Papa Is All*, which treated of the Pennsylvania Dutch, *The First Crocus*, which had to do with Scandinavian-Americans, *The Great Big Doorstep*, which dealt with the Cajuns, and *The First Million*, which was concerned with Kentucky hillbillies. It is without the slightest suggestion of dramatic action, whether physical or verbal; its characters, embracing the brash brat, the parasite son-in-law, the girl with illegitimate child, the indolent old sponging uncle, the all-wise mother, the daughter separated from the boy she loves, *et al.*, are entirely the effigies out of past plays on end; the humor takes such forms as "I think you've got something up your sleeve" with the retort "Yes, my arm," to say nothing of Olsen and Johnson witticisms about toilet

seats and the human posterior, the latter here provided with a folk flavor by being referred to as a "heinie"; and the acting, with minor exception, was of the species more usually encountered in the one-floor-up little theatres.

To make matters worse, the authors have incorporated into their play a solemn message which under the circumstances assumes a low-comedy mask. The message in point is a plea for the understanding kind of Americanism that will be tolerant of foreigners in our midst, which, since it is put into words by a female Czech who experiences intolerance solely and singly at the hands of an idiotic prig who appears to be equally intolerant of his American neighbors and whom the American community in which the Czech woman lives thoroughly detests, may be said to possess a force akin to that of a plea for American tolerance of Porterhouse steaks.

The star of the occasion was Madame Katina Paxinou, a Greek actress who had appeared in New York briefly a few seasons before as Hedda Gabler in one of the poorest performances of the role within the memory of the oldest living critic and who subsequently and perhaps conformably won the Motion Picture Academy's award for a performance in a film. The Madame, despite the tribute paid to her by Hollywood, remains every bit as bad an actress as she was before she went West. Her performance as the Czech heroine was simply a pitched-battle between physical contortions and face-makings; in it there was no trace of inner feeling, or of emotional command, or of anything that was not wholly on the surface, like a splashing goldfish.

The direction by one Michael Gordon of Hollywood involved so much mad galloping about the stage and so much noise that the audience momentarily expected the actors to come down into the aisles as in the Olsen and Johnson show and dance with it.

SING OUT, SWEET LAND! DECEMBER 27, 1944

A "salute to American folk and popular music," book by Walter Kerr, music arranged and especially composed by Elie Siegmeister. Produced by the Theatre Guild for 101 performances in the International Theatre.

PRINCIPALS

Alfred Drake, Burl Ives, Bibi Osterwald, Alma Kaye, Philip Coolidge, Jack McCauley, Robert Penn, James Westerfield, Peter Hamilton, Irene Hawthorne, and Ethel Mann.

MR. KERR, abetted by the Theatre Guild, has badly fumbled a scheme which might have been developed into excellent theatre. His purpose was to present a combination Johnny Appleseed and Paul Bunyan banished for levity from old Puritan New England who, resolved into a timeless minstrel, wanders in the long, following years throughout a growing America and seeks through its common song to bring to its peoples neighborliness, mutual understanding, happiness, and unity. Imaginatively treated, the theme's possibilities are plain. But so coquettish is much of the writing that has been visited upon it, so childish, when it is not downright cheap, is the humor, and so lacking in sound fancy is the general approach that the result in the aggregate is little more than a poorly extended paraphrase of such an exhibit of the late Labor Stage as the pageant called *Labor Sings*, in a program which embraced the Walt Whitman derived *I Hear America Singing*.

Furthermore, not only is the theme written out of its potentialities but its proud essence waywardly gets out of the playwright's hands. The American people among whom his hero roams down the years are for the greater part a worthless and criminal lot: river-boat gamblers and swindlers, gangsters, crooked police, speakeasy operators, harlots, cadging tramps, seducers, street-walkers, drunks, and the like. And where they are not of that general species they

are so silly, as in the instance of old Oregon trail pioneers who enter into a copious burlesque show weeping upon the sound of a melancholy ditty, that the presentation's basic sentimental but heroic idea takes on an equal coating of the ridiculous.

The attempts at humor contribute additionally to the theme's deterioration, as does such character nomenclature as Barnaby Goodchild, Parson Killjoy, Charity WOULDlove, etc. For example, the songs "While Strolling Through The Park" and "Heaven Will Protect The Working Girl" are made to serve a travesty ten-twenty-thirty melodrama in which the dark, moustache-curling villain pursues the virtuous maiden and which is not only staler than stale but which is more suited to a side-street beer hall of the 1920's than to any such historical pageant as Mr. Kerr may originally have had in mind. Nor are less invalidating such humors as lie in a man's violently colored underwear, the old business of a man's holding another man's hand under the impression that it is that of a woman who has stealthily made her exit, the further business of the man who observes resolutely that women can not boss him and who a moment later subserviently obeys one's command, the old Weber-Fields card game, such lines as a disreputable tramp's remark that he will be unable to get to the reunion of his class at Harvard, the baby-talk gangster's moll, and unremitting jokes about marriage.

How the author hoped to realize his intention of inducing a nostalgic affection in his audience with any such materials is difficult to determine. And not less difficult is how he hoped to induce in it pride in America's past, present, and future. Under the circumstances, the main impression an audience gets is merely that of a vaudeville performer singing a program of folk and popular songs before backdrops representing various periods in American history and being interrupted by the lesser comedians and dancers on the same bill.

The exhibit's songs include, among others, Puritan hymns, "Way Down The Ohio," "Foggy, Foggy Dew," "Little Mohee," "The Devil And The Farmer's Wife,"

"Oh, Susannah," "Oregon Trail," "Watermelon Cry," "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel," "Frankie and Johnny," "The Roving Gambler," "Polly Wolly Doodle," "Blue Tail Fly," "Casey Jones," "Rock Candy Mountain," "Wanderin'," "Hallelujah, I'm A Bum," "A Bicycle Built For Two," "A Hot Time In The Old Town Tonight," "Basement Blues," "I Got Rhythm," "At Sundown," "My Blue Heaven," "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby," etc. Why some of these popular later tunes by Gershwin and Donaldson were chosen in preference to such considerably more popular tunes as Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band" and Burnet's "Melancholy Baby" is no less puzzling than the use of W. C. Handy's little known "Basement Blues" in preference to either his famous "Beale Street Blues" or "St. Louis Blues." And certainly, when it comes to popular songs, more popular and more widely sung in America than some of those incorporated into the show were "After The Ball," "The Bowery," "Do, Do, My Huckleberry, Do," "And The Band Played On," "Hiawatha," "I'm A Yankee Doodle Dandy," "Go Way Back And Sit Down," "I'd Leave My Happy Home For You," "In The Good Old Summertime," "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, The Boys Are Marching," "Just Before The Battle, Mother," "The Battle Cry Of Freedom," "My Gal's A Highborn Lady," "My Old Kentucky Home," "The Sidewalks Of New York," "On The Banks Of The Wabash," and a dozen or two such obvious others.

Any so-called cavalcade of American song, folk and popular, as this *Sing Out, Sweet Land!* purports to be would seem to call for a good orchestra in the pit and some superior voices. The Theatre Guild's failure to provide them has resulted in a presentation more appropriate to the platform of Town Hall than to the professional stage. When done originally by the Catholic University of Washington, D. C., which by and large offers one of the most frequently inventive and progressive amateur theatre groups in the country, the show must have managed a much better impression, since where little in the way of financial outlay is possible or expected an audience hospitably remits judgment and is pleased by results within the means at hand.

But any critical audience in the present professional theatre is not so inclined to remit judgment; it has been spoiled by productions that spend every last cent to constitute them what they should be; and managerial scrimping upsets it and tends to make it hostile. What any such folk song panorama, even at its poorest, theatrically demands is by no means a necessarily lavish treatment but at least a sufficient professional treatment, and, to repeat, the Guild has neglected to supply it. Since considerable motion picture money is reported to have been invested in the enterprise, it is hard to determine the reason for the Guild's scrimping in the directions noted. Perhaps it is a case less of scrimping than of poor judgment and weak theatrical taste. Whatever it may be, things are not right. For all the show's intrinsic feebleness it might have been fabricated into an at least superficially more lively evening had its casting been more expert and its staging more expansive.

As it is, only Burl Ives, the popular balladist, emerges with any measure of credit.

ON THE TOWN. DECEMBER 28, 1944

A musical show with book and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, music by Leonard Bernstein. Produced by Oliver Smith and Paul Feigay for a beyond the season run in, initially, the Adelphi Theatre.

PROGRAM

WORKMAN	Marten Sameth	FIGMENT	Remo Bufano
2ND WORKMAN	Frank Milton	CLAIRE	Betty Comden
3RD WORKMAN	Herbert Greene	HIGH SCHOOL GIRL	Nellie Fisher
OZZIE	Adolph Green	SAILOR IN BLUE	Richard D'Arcy
CHIP	Cris Alexander	MAUDE P. DILLY	Susan Steel
SAILOR	Lyle Clark	IVY	Sono Osato
GABEY	John Battles	LUCY SCHMEELER	Alice Pearce
ANDY	Frank Westbrook	PITKIN	Robert Chisholm
TOM	Richard D'Arcy	MASTER OF CEREMONIES	
FLOSSIE	Florence MacMichael		Frank Milton
FLOSSIE'S FRIEND	Marion Kohler	SINGER	Frances Cassard
BILL POSTER	Larry Bolton	WAITER	Herbert Greene
LITTLE OLD LADY	Maxine Arnold	SPANISH SINGER	Jeanne Gordon
POLICEMAN	Lonny Jackson	THE GREAT LOVER	Ray Garrison
S. UPERMAN	Milton Taubman	CONDUCTOR	Herbert Greene
HILDY	Nancy Walker	BIMMY	Robert Lorenz
POLICEMAN	Roger Treat		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. Brooklyn Navy Yard. Scene 2. Subway. Scene 3. Street. Scene 4. Miss Turnstiles. Scene 5. A taxi. Scene 6. Museum. Scene 7. Outside the park. Scene 8. Corridor of Carnegie Hall. Scene 9. Carnegie Hall (Madame Dilly's studio). Scene 10. Claire's apartment. Scene 11. Hildy's apartment. Scene 12. Times Square. Act II. Scene 1. Night clubs (a) Diamond Eddie's, (b) Congacabana, (c) Slam-Bang. Scene 2. Gabey in the playground of the rich. Scene 3. The subway. Scene 4. Coney Island. Scene 5. Navy Yard.

THE POPULAR SUCCESS of the show re-emphasizes the later day predilection of theatregoers for stages given over to plays and musicals devoted to the young of the species. The predilection is apparently a reflection of John Mason Brown's acute lecture observation that the American passionate eagerness to keep young amounts almost to a genius

for arrested development. I should think, however, that if anything could help to discourage that eagerness it would be the many shows, let alone plays, like this one which pursue the theory that anyone, male or female, under twenty-one years of age invariably comports himself, both mentally and physically, like a combination Arab vaudeville tumbler and congenital imbecile. Yet any such discouragement is far from the fact, and youth thus presented continues to be thought both refreshing and lovable, and the exhibits which merchant it are generally pretty certain of box-office prosperity.

That youth, whether on the stage or off, is frequently attractive and charming there is no debating, save in the case of elderly cynics who hope to conceal their Faustian disappointments in Mephistophelian epigrams, however here and there fraught with the wisdom of experience. But to be attractive and charming on the stage, particularly the stage of musical shows, it is hardly too much to ask that its chosen representatives possess faces and figures that one may look at without æsthetic alarm, which is scarcely the case in the show under immediate scrutiny and in most of the young women in that show in particular. It is not easy to dream of vernal beauty in the presence of a stage replete with physiognomy that is downright frightening, figures that disclose a heavy deficit, and legs become so knobby and knees so bruised from protracted terpsichorean gymnastics that ballets and dance numbers take on the appearance of alumni Rugby football games.

The show itself is an elaboration of the Ballet Theatre's *Fancy Free*, which dealt with three sailors on shore leave and their girls and the choreography, music and scenery of which were respectively by the same Jerome Robbins, Leonard Bernstein and Oliver Smith who are responsible for a considerable portion of it. Robbins' ballet theme, which sufficed for something like half an hour, is here stretched strainfully like a small rubber band to embrace fivefold that length of time and, while now and again providing some fair amusement, too often abruptly snaps back into its pullers' faces.

Involved in the pull are Betty Comden and Adolph Green, night club entertainers whom the trio named have summoned to their aid. Their contribution to the pull is hardly powerful. It is evident that their humors, properly to be enjoyed, require an obbligato of alcoholic liquor. Without any such stimulant, dialogue like a sailor's "Will you show me the road to the Museum of Natural History?" and a female's retort, "I'll show you the road to ruin!" is not likely to get any enthusiastic reaction. Nor are witticisms like "Now that I'm done with *Tobacco Road*, I'm going to wash my feet" — "And live on *Angel Street*, I suppose." Lyrics having to do with a loose girl's assurance to a man that she can nevertheless cook and with the loneliness of a stranger in New York are further scarcely calculated to over-impress the cold sober. And such stage business as a woman's measuring a male's skull to determine his affinity with an ape, the struggle for an empty seat in a Subway train, and a burlesque of a cabaret floor show (negotiated some seasons ago in *Pal Joey* with infinitely more wit) are additionally remiss as substitutes for the cup.

The ballet phases of the show, contrived by Mr. Robbins, in one or two instances display symptoms of imagination, but the stage is overburdened with them and before the evening is done one is sorry one ever made remarks about the Tiller girls. Moreover, just one such ballet that didn't conclude with the men holding the principal female dancer aloft would be a welcome novelty.

The staging of the other portions of the exhibit by George Abbott, who is always fetched by these exercises in stage youth, is in his best jumping-jack, scooter tradition and contributes prosperously to the previously noted affectionate legend that young folk never under any circumstances enjoy a moment of repose but spend their days as if every twenty-four hours were a steeple-chase. So given to an admiration of mere movement for movement's sake is Mr. Abbott that he has even resorted at six different periods to something that one had thought had happily disappeared from the stage years ago, to wit, what is known in theatrical parlance as the lobster-box, that flickering contrivance

which gives actors in slow motion the appearance of being hell-bent for one destination or another.

Bernstein's music, while occasionally not without some intrinsic merit, more frequently strains with patent discomfort for popularity. Smith's sets, picturing various metropolitan localities, are nicely in key with the show's intention, though one may be forgiven for wishing that scene designers will soon abandon the dated idea that lopsided buildings, simply by virtue of the fact that they are not painted in an upright position, become scenic art worthy of the French modernists at their best. Among the performers, Nancy Walker with her tough girl antics and Sono Osato, when she dances and does not speak, are the most acceptable. Miss Comden and Mr. Green, the collaborators on the show who also act in it, respectively content their histrionism with two-hour imitations of Miss Ilka Chase and the Ringling Brothers' Toto.

TRIO. DECEMBER 29, 1944

A play by Dorothy and Howard Baker, based upon the former's novel of the same title. Produced by Lee Sabinson for 67 performances in the Belasco Theatre.

PROGRAM

JANET LOGAN	Lots Wheeler	RALPH HACKETT	Ken Tower
PAULINE MAURY	Lydia St. Clair	MRS. GIRARD	Sara Perry
RAY MACKENZIE		DEAN HARRY KENNEDY	
	Richard Widmark		Harry Irvine
TED GORDON	Kenneth Williams	HOUSE BOY	Henry Goon
MISS HAWLEY			
	Mary Alan Hokanson		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. Pauline Maury's apartment. A Thursday afternoon. Scene 2. The same. One hour later. Act II. Ray Mackenzie's apartment. An evening three weeks later. Act III. Same as Act I. Later that evening.

LEE SHUBERT refused the play a booking in any of his New York theatres on the ground that its Lesbian theme might possibly bring about a padlocking under the Wales law. Having suffered a year's such shutting down of his Ambassador Theatre in the case of *Wine, Women And Song* several seasons before, he declared that he was unwilling to risk another chance and was roundly denounced for his action by persons who, having nothing to lose, constituted themselves bravely vociferous champions of the play's authors and producer. Mr. Shubert nevertheless had a great deal on his side. Though the play is perfectly decent, had played without interference for several weeks in Boston and Philadelphia, and is rightly uncensorable, there was no way for him to foretell what official reaction to it in New York might be. The moralists had once raided *The Captive*, Bourdet's fine treatment of the Lesbian theme and, though both *Love Of Women* and *Wise Tomorrow* subsequently dealt with the same theme and went free, no one could insure against a reversion to their earlier idiosyncrasy. *Wine,*

Women And Song was no whit dirtier than half a dozen other shows that have been allowed to run their courses, and it was far less dirty than *Hairpin Harmony*, which expired on its own without any outside protest against it, or than *Catherine Was Great, School For Brides*, and numerous other such smutty plays that have been given official *carte blanche*. It is all very well for one ducally to fight for a free stage, but it becomes an academic matter in the face of the realistic fact that irresponsible and ignorant censorship, though it may not cost one a cent, may cause a theatre owner not only to lose possession of his theatre for an entire year at great expense to himself but may also cause him to be thrown summarily into jail. That Mr. Shubert's precautions were not ill-founded was demonstrated when, after the play had been running for two months, censorship in the person of License Commissioner Moss pounced upon the Belasco Theatre and declared its license forfeited save the play be immediately withdrawn, which it was.

Trio is a completely honest play dealing with an older woman's sexual and mental control over a young girl and the latter's eventual break from perversion through the intervention of a young man whom she has come to love. It is without sensationalism, and without any deliberate intent to catch the ear of prurient groundlings. Compared with Bourdet's excellent play it is third-rate; it out-talks its subject matter, it engages at two points in extrinsic melodrama, and in one instance, that of the young man's character, neglects to support his stubborn blindness to the young girl's sexual abnormality with any such hintful psychological explanation as, say, Schnitzler employed in the case of his *Anatol* and *Hilda*, or *Cora* as she is known in the Granville-Barker translation. But it nonetheless otherwise contains some sharp appreciation of character and some intermittently sound writing, and as drama is superior to the average run. The long scene in the second act wherein the boy and girl vainly struggle with themselves and each other toward an understanding is in particular ably written and projects itself with no little force.

Bretaigne Windust's direction, except for the melodra-

matic crockery-smashing at the end of the second act and the handling of the play's conclusion in the suicide of the older woman, was first-rate. Lydia St. Clair, a French actress, while occasionally given to the trick exhibitionism common to many European actresses, managed the role of the pre-hensile Lesbian for the most part satisfactorily; Richard Widmark, who was so very bad in the previous season's *Get Away, Old Man*, was surprisingly right, doubtless because of intelligent direction, as the young man; and Lois Wheeler, practically a novice in the theatre, gave in the role of the sexual victim one of the most remarkable performances on the part of a new, young actress that we have seen on the local stage in several years. Her occasional awkwardness, criticized by some, was wisely not coached out of her by Mr. Windust and added materially to the portrayal of a character that, if devoid of such occasional awkwardness, would have taken on in artificially induced smooth manner a sense of sophistication which would have utterly ruined it.

THE HASTY HEART. JANUARY 3, 1945

A play by John Patrick. Produced by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse for a beyond the season run in the Hudson Theatre.

PROGRAM

ORDERLY	Francis Neilsen	TOMMY	Douglas Chandler
YANK	John Lund	MARGARET	Anne Burr
DIGGER	John Campbell	COLONEL	Edward Cooper
KIWI	Victor Chapin	LACHLEN	Richard Basehart
BLOSSOM	Earl Jones		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *Early morning.* Act II. Scene 1. *Two weeks later.* Scene 2. *A few nights later.* Act III. Scene 1. *The next day.* Scene 2. *The following morning.*

The entire action takes place in a convalescent ward of a British general hospital behind the Assam-Burma front.

MR. PATRICK believes properly that emotion is the key-stone of drama. Though this, his latest play, indicates a greater critical reticence in that direction than his two previous efforts, it still suggests, however, that given any single emotion he has difficulty in allowing it to pursue its natural course but must needs seize it in his theatrical teeth and fling it this way and that long after the life in it has expired. In *Hell Freezes Over*, produced for twenty-five performances a decade ago, he tortured the theme of a group of explorers caught in the icy wastes of the South Pole into a super-Grand Guignolism which involved excruciating deaths from exposure, from vengeful bullets fired by betrayed husbands and vindictive lovers, from poison administered both to a cripple and to himself by a doctor attached to the expedition, and from starvation induced in a man sadistically handcuffed to the wreck of a dirigible. In *The Willow And I*, produced for twenty-eight performances three seasons ago, he permitted himself a slightly greater emotional restraint in the case of two sisters ferociously in

love with the same man, one of whom was determined to shoot herself if she lost him to the other and the first of whom, in fighting for possession of the gun, was shot. Believing that she had killed her, the other sister went crazy and for the ensuing thirty years purveyed enough extravagant emotionalism to stock the entire Sardou drama, all to the accompaniment of detonating thunder and lightning stage effects. In *The Hasty Heart*, Mr. Patrick's economy has progressed to the point where the restraint embraces the spectacle of a single stubborn, introspective, selfish and suspicious Scot soldier's violent reaction to sympathetic proffers of friendship on the part of military colleagues who know, though he does not, that he is doomed soon to die, of his gradual reluctant if overly verbose surrender to the profilers, of his shocked discovery of their motivation and his copious indignation at being made an object of pity, and of his final truce with the good offices. Mr. Patrick seemingly is making some headway against melodrama.

Though his theme, while more or less familiar, is still functionable, he however so insistently strikes the same emotional chord, he so continuously grinds his heel into ground already furrowed, and he writes in so commonplace and unillumined a manner that it loses much of its pregnancy. Two or three scenes manage briefly to capture some eloquence, but for the most part a play that should honorably emotionalize an audience succeeds only in emotionalizing its actors. Throughout its course I could not resist the feeling that it should have been written by an Irishman. That feeling was induced by a recollection of Synge's idea of style: "In a good play, every speech should be as fully flavored as a nut or apple, and such speeches can not be written by any one who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry. In Ireland for a few years more we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent and tender, so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of the local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks." And that recollection was brought about in turn,

and doubtless waywardly, by a speech in the play having to do with the protagonist's proud declaration, after his metamorphosis, that he had psychically enjoyed the experience of a king. "Did you see an old woman going down the path?" asks the mother of her son in Yeats' *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, after Cathleen, the personification of Ireland, has left their peasant hut. "I did not," the boy answers, "but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen!"

Mr. Patrick's speeches, far from being as fully flavored as a nut or apple, are prune-dried, and all the soaring fire that should be in such a one as that alluding to a king is diminished to a minor flicker.

The attempts humorously to lighten the whole, furthermore, often contribute to an additional weakening of the theme. "I had a terrible dream last night — I dreamt I was working," is one example. Hearing a sleeping soldier's loud snoring, another soldier observes, "It sounds like a rhinoceros calling his mate," which is a second. A nurse's plunging of a clinical thermometer into a garrulous soldier's mouth to make him shut up is still another. A soldier's repeated facetiae about having been shot in the posterior; a soldier's indignant denial that he is fat but, according to the hospital report, only obese; another's remark that he is going to write to his Congressman whose name is probably Mabel; yet another's that the only reason for playing a bagpipe is to get away from the sound; and such business as the thrifty Scot's careful preservation of the butt of a cigarette are other examples, one and all calling for the ministrations of a chiropodist. And, if not a chiropodist, surely the application of a sizeable Blue-jay plaster would be beneficial as well to such humors as involve a couple of men belaboring each other with fly swatters or distributing themselves on the floor in order to determine what, if anything, a Scot wears under his kilt.

The dramaturgical enterprise which Mr. Patrick undertook was not an easy one. Any play laid throughout in the convalescent ward of a hospital offers a serious challenge to dramatic movement. And when, in addition, what movement the theme may conceivably possess is lodged largely in

a single character's mouth, with the other characters serving as mere sounding-boards, the challenge is increased. That is, save the writing, as noted, have bloom, which Mr. Patrick's has not. Now and again a sprig of green fights its way through the frozen soil, but too often, for all the applaudable effort to thaw the ground, the plant remains only a promise.

The favorable public response to the play means only that what might possibly have been a dignified contribution to drama has been willy-nilly written down to the box-office and popularized out of its dignity. Sentimentality, which in this case is simply sentiment filtered through poor writing, takes its toll of an intrinsically upright theme, and the net dramatic impression is of John Shand paraphrased by the author of *The Wookey*.

Bretaigne Windust's direction was once again as expert as the obstinate materials permitted, and the male members of the company, especially John Lund as a tough Yankee ambulance driver and Richard Basehart (there is an old 10-20-30 melodrama name for you!) as the Scot protagonist, were endorsable. Miss Burr, however, once again brought to the nurse's role that abundance of rapid eye-blinking to indicate everything from tender affection to acute indignation and that tendency to articulate her speeches through the nasal septum which in combination heretofore have disabled her performances.

MANY HAPPY RETURNS. JANUARY 5, 1945

A comedy by Clare Kummer. Produced by Harry Bloomfield for 3 performances in the Playhouse.

PROGRAM

ETHEL	Nan Butler	CHARLES BARROWS	Rex O'Malley
JO BARNETT	Michael Dreyfuss	JANE	Jayne Cotter
HENRY BURTON	Neil Hamilton	CYNTHIA LACEBY	Mary Astor
ALBERT	Leonard Carey	TOM CARRUTHERS	Vincent Gardner
FAY	Nell O'Day		
EDDIE	Don Gibson		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *Living-room of Henry Burton's house in New York City.* Scene 2. *The same. After dinner.* Act II. *Mrs. Laceby's apartment. A little later.* Act III. *Same as Act I. Later still.*

Time. *The present.*

Place. *New York City.*

WHAT MRS. KUMMER's play was like in its original form, I have no exact means of knowing. But, knowing her previous plays well and learning further that she had lodged a protest with the Dramatists' Guild over the alterations which had been made in her script by the management, it may safely be ventured that, even at its poorest, it was nevertheless in general far superior to the exhibit offered. Even as offered, a comedy not without some sly remaining wit and intrinsic charm was to be detected through the thick, wet cloud of wholly unsuitable casting, dismal acting, miserable stage direction, and rankly gratuitous manuscript revisions.

It has always been the Kummer dramaturgical technique to eliminate from any theme she may select what meat there may be in it and to serve only the distilled gravy, as it has ever been her writing device to avoid direct dialogic statement in so far as possible and to suggest its content elliptically. This has been true of all her playwriting from *Good Gracious*, *Annabelle* to *A Successful Calamity* and from *Rollo's Wild Oat to Be Calm*, *Camilla* and *The Lights Of*

Duxbury. She is, in a way, a kind of American Sacha Guitry minus the Guitry sex element and her light, fragile comedies demand much the same stage treatment as Guitry's. Save they be cast with precisely the right actors and directed into the airy abandon of a toy balloon they go to pieces. A moment of overly studied action, a moment of serious pause, and they are lost.

In the present instance Mrs. Kummer has taken the recognizable theme of a middle-aged father who, finding his son's marriage threatened by the boy's infatuation for another woman, goes through the old Nat Goodwin motions of seeking out the woman with the intention of buying her off and of being himself fascinated by her. The story, however, is as usual in her case of no particular moment; she employs it simply as something with which to hit off droll little facets of character and to sneak away from with polite badinage. The badinage as we get it in the presented version of the comedy is sometimes, however, so remote from the previous Kummer quality ("We were all fish once" — "Some of us are still fish" is a horrible example) that it is obviously the insertion of other hands. Such other hands, indeed, are clearly visible throughout the play, and where they have not made heavy pudding of what was soufflé, the before-mentioned casting, acting and direction contrived to throw the author's original plan completely out of focus and to weigh down what should have been nimble froth with performances and stage manipulation more aptly suited to a bad specimen of the problem drama of the 1890's.

What the comedy demanded was the sort of acting and production which Arthur Hopkins visited upon the author's early plays. What it got was the motion picture actress, Miss Astor, in a role that called for someone like Ina Claire or a similarly experienced polite comédienne who would not, among other things, intrude such pronunciations as "repertore" and "iridiscent" into a portrayal of elegant savoir faire; the motion picture actor, Neil Hamilton, in a role that cried for the dry suavity of the William Gillette who served *A Successful Calamity* and that received instead acting which suggested that its occupant was reading

his lines from a blackboard held aloft behind a film camera; and stage direction by three or four persons under the blanket name of Peter Berneis which consisted largely of pouring out sherry at five-minute intervals, causing those characters who drank it to smack their lips elaborately for three minutes afterward, and making those who didn't want it exit for no other discernible reason.

A single moving picture actor has frequently helped to devastate a play, and this one suffered two. The unanimous condemnation of the play itself by the reviewers was therefore, it seems to me, while in a way understandable under the circumstances, the old visual issue of the woods and the trees.

Mrs. Kummer was thoroughly justified in entering the blanket protest with the Dramatists' Guild, even though a court decision denied her the award of five thousand dollars for the damage done to her play. While playwrights have often prospered through revisions and handling of their work by intelligent producers, there have been plenty of others who, falling into unintelligent hands, have helplessly seen their work botched out of all recognition and have suffered blame from the reviewers through no fault of their own and which, to anyone acquainted with the facts, was richly undeserved.

Several seasons ago, for example, a play called *The Walking Gentleman* was shown in New York. By a strange coincidence a play of exactly the same name by Fulton Oursler and Grace Perkins was advertised to open on the same night. By an even stranger coincidence the names of Fulton Oursler and Grace Perkins appeared as authors of the play that did open. But by an even still stranger coincidence the play that opened was no more like the play that didn't than mush is like mushrooms. The play that opened closed after just six performances. The play that did not might conceivably have achieved some success.

The play that didn't open was frankly designed as a thrill murder melodrama; the play that did turned out to be a kind of French sex-problem play, and about as bernsteinish as they come. The responsible party was, to a large extent, a

French movie actor named Victor Francen, who had been engaged to play the leading role. This Francen, who apparently esteems himself a lady-killer of irresistible beauty, fascination, and charm, instantly took charge of things. An exciting scene in the original script wherein he was called upon to choke to death a serving maid whom he suspected of having eavesdropped a dangerous admission on his part and who was subsequently revealed to him as being deaf and dumb, he peremptorily declared out. "It would make me unsympathetic to the audience," was his firm explanation. A Jekyll-Hyde transformation scene found him adamant on two points: either the Hyde mask which he would wear must be hardly less comely than his own face when disclosed as Jekyll or the whole business would have to be eliminated, which it was. The scene in which he got his wife alone in her apartment preparatory to strangling her must not, he insisted, be played menacingly but with a Palais Royal farcical touch, which is the way he played it. And just before sneaking up threateningly behind his intended victim, he must, for the effect it would have on the ladies out front, execute a droll *pas seul* and then hand her, with a low bow, a rose!

These are only a few of the reasons for the current insanity of the play's authors. And speaking of insanity, there naturally comes to mind Saroyan. If Saroyan is crazy, as some maintain, the causes are similarly not far to seek. I nominate just one out of many. When his *Love's Old Sweet Song* was in the process of Philadelphia try-out, Walter Huston, the leading actor, professed to find the touching curtain to the second act, showing a small child deserted on the steps of the burning house and calling through its tears for its parents, quite unsatisfactory. It was his opinion grounded on long experience, he averred, that, as he was the star of the play, the audience would be sorely disappointed if he were not on the stage at the fall of the curtain, and hence on the stage he should and must be. So out went the scene over Saroyan's dead or at least despairingly alcoholized body, and Huston was there, like a troop of pleased Marines, to the child's rescue.

The preliminary stages of Saroyan's lunacy came into evidence at the try-out, some time before, of *The Time Of Your Life* in New Haven, Connecticut. Arriving from Fresno, he hurried to the theatre and there laid eyes upon something that caused him to exclaim My God! so loudly and so consecutively that the Yale students on the campus a mile away concluded that the Ouachita Baptist College basketball team must have just pulled into the station and was rehearsing its college yell. What he laid eyes on was his low saloon on the San Francisco waterfront transformed under director Robert Lewis' inspiration into a setting that looked like a lovely oriental version of little Hannele's bedroom, with in a far corner a bar just big enough for the service of a single cocktail and with enough purple, green, amber, peachbloom and vermillion lights playing upon it to equip Grauman's Chinese movie palace for the world première of a two million dollar class-F picture. What he further laid eyes on was, under the ingenious spell of the same director, a company of actors who had been coached to play his ragtag and bobtail characters as if they were participants in a Japanese *Nō* play written by Frederick Lonsdale in collaboration with Maurice Maeterlinck. And what he still further saw, before they carried him out on a stretcher frothing at the mouth and wildly calling out the names of Ruby Foo, Sessue Hayakawa and Warden Lawes, was a play dealing with the riff-raff in an Embarcadero gin-and-beer dump which was directorially indistinguishable in its main features from the Russian ballet's *Petrouchka*.

For countless years before and since the late Louis Mann sent the author of the play, *The Consul*, to Matteawan by suddenly incorporating into it on the opening night a secretly long-treasured sentimental fifteen-minute homily on the beauties of home life, which wrecked the play, producers, actors and directors have conspired against the sanity of those negligibilities whose sole contribution to the drama is drama. Like my otherwise good friend Walter Wanger, who one day some years ago happened to glimpse the actor Walter Pidgeon walk into his Hollywood studio office in a becoming uniform and promptly got on six telephones and

commanded as many scenario writers to get busy at once on a movie in which he could wear it, theatrical producers, directors and almost everybody else associated with them view writers much as wives view husbands, necessary evils not exactly always to be murdered on the spot but maybe to be contemptuously tolerated and endured only on the chance that they may turn in a little money on Saturday night.

When Edward Sheldon and Charles MacArthur wrote *Lulu Belle*, it was their intention that the play, broadly speaking, be a Negro paraphrase of the *Carmen* theme. David Belasco, the producer, had other ideas however. And gradually as rehearsals progressed their play, to their loud outcries and agonies, resolved itself into a Negro *Camille*. Tearing his hair, MacArthur indignantly argued with his collaborator that they should immediately remove their names from the abortion, to which Sheldon, as they led him out violently protesting that he was Williams and Walker and quite sane, issued the parting sigh that they should at least both be satisfied that Belasco had not turned it into a Negro *Ben Hur*.

More recently, a brace of Irish playwrights were released from the sanitarium, whence productions of their plays had sent them, only after several months' observation and treatment. The two were Paul Vincent Carroll and St. John Ervine. Carroll was not in America when his *The Old Foolishness* opened and soon thereafter closed, but when the notices and communiqués reached him he threw himself to the floor and, before they could stop him, had frantically nibbled seven square feet of carpet. What destroyed his reason was the news that the play's director, Rachel Crothers, dissatisfied with some of his Celtic dialogue, had written some of her Bloomington, Illinois, own to take its place and had thus brought the reviewers to flay the hide off him for his peculiar, sudden literary collapse. And not only that. Pursuing some personal whim, this Miss Crothers had further, he learned, not only so staged the play that the emphasis fell heavily upon a character it was not intended to, thereby throwing the theme wholly out of kilter, but had cut out the long final speech, the one really beautiful bit of

writing in the script, and thus destroyed what little was left of the mess.

At length recovering from the shock sufficiently to be allowed at large, Carroll was again promptly returned to the sanitarium upon his receipt of news of the casting of his *The Strings, My Lord, Are False*. The threatened deletion of the phrase *My Lord* from his fine title derived from *Julius Caesar*, which met the clerical nature of the play perfectly, he managed to survive with the aid of a couple of cases of Scotch. But when he heard that in the role of his parish priest, whom he had pictured as a gentle cross between Cedric Hardwicke and Al Shean, the producer had cast that grim Phi Beta Kappa emotionalist Walter Hampden, celebrated earlier in the season for his conversion of Sir Anthony Absolute into a walking case of whooping cough complicated with hay fever, he got down eight more square feet of the carpet — to say nothing of an extra square foot on the casting of the coloratura comédienne Ruth Gordon as the tragic young heroine — before the ambulance arrived.

St. John Ervine, our other Irish guest-playwright, was perfectly normal until he discovered what they had done to his play, *Boyd's Shop*. As with Carroll, the change of the title to *Boyd's Daughter* by way of foolish hope more greatly to fascinate the box-office did not too seriously exercise him. But when he learned that one of the actors in the play was coming before the curtain at the end of each of the acts and delivering a facetious monologue about the play, the players and even the audience, to the complete demolition of any interest his play might possibly have had, his appetite for what remained of Carroll's carpet may naturally be understood.

Upon observing what the Theatre Guild had done to his play, *Dynamo*, including among other things the casting in a highly dramatic role of the then fair cutie, Claudette Colbert, who placed her beautiful legs on distracting display whenever the going became serious, Eugene O'Neill vowed he would never again permit a work of his to be produced unless he himself could be present to safeguard its inter-

ests. The vow was well taken, even though a subsequent play, which chivalrously shall be nameless, went largely to pot in the second act when the rugged looking young actor who had been cast in a forthright masculine role tardily and dismayingingly revealed himself to be *Viola tricolor*, and with a falsetto that would have put the late Florence Mills to shame. But the vow was assuredly well taken in the instance of *Days Without End* when, a few days before the play was to open, O'Neill appeared at rehearsal and to his horror found that the Guild for reasons of economy had substituted for the all-important crucifix in the old church, described by O'Neill as "a great cross with a life-size figure of Christ, and an exceptionally fine piece of wood carving," a miniature plaster of paris crucifix of the kind sold in the Sixth Avenue novelty shops for peanuts.

What the immediate state of S. N. Behrman's health is, I do not know. But if he is still convalescing from the pains of *The Talley Method*, I can comprehend and sympathize. When the play first went into rehearsal, the direction was entrusted to Elmer Rice, a fellow-member with Behrman in the Playwrights' Company. After due process of trial and error, which ran into long weeks, Rice was voted out and Herman Shumlin brought in. Shumlin did what he could, but when the play opened in New York the actors, utterly confused by the two totally different methods and styles of direction, found themselves playing according to both at one and the same time, thus projecting a performance that was as peculiar a mixture as if the understudies of a company playing *Dear Ruth* were called in at the last moment to substitute for a company playing *Anna Lucasta*.

It is easy for us critics to criticize playwrights, but the remarkable thing, considering all the circumstances, is that they retain enough sanity to write even the kind of plays they lately have been writing. In testimony thereto, consider Robert Turney's *Daughters Of Atreus*, a formal paraphrase of classic Greek drama cast with such a variety of German, Russian, Polish, Boston and what not other foreign accents that it sounded like a Weber and Fields show put on by the Moscow Art Theatre in Chinese. Think, too,

of John Barrymore's miscellaneous low asides to his fellow actors and saucy remarks to the audience which drove at least one author to drink and another and more celebrated one, long dead, to grave acrobatics. Recollect further Richard Bennett's and Lowell Sherman's periodic denunciations of audiences who didn't seem sufficiently to be relishing their performances and what happened to the poor authors' plays. And while you are about it, meditate the star actress who got herself so full of strong waters on the opening night of a certain well-known dramatist's play that, in its most important scene, she walked haughtily into a bookcase under the impression that it was a door; of another who also under the influence got herself so tangled up in her voluminous boudoir negligée that she fell plumb on her nates, with the play following suit; of still another, cold sober, who more recently came on the stage wearing tiny bells on her slippers, which she tinkled merrily whenever another actress in the company whom she didn't like threatened to divert the audience's attention from her; and — still speaking of the ladies — of the fairly venerable one who not so long ago, under the impression that she was being youthfully cute, kept jumping over the seated leading man's extended legs and thus turned the playwright's intended character of a woman of aristocratic bearing into a vaudeville kangaroo.

Poor Mrs. Kummer.

A LADY SAYS YES. JANUARY 10, 1945

A musical comedy originally titled A Lady Of ?, book by Clayton Ashley, music by Fred Spielman and Arthur Gershwin, lyrics by Stanley Adams. Produced by J. J. Shubert in association with Clayton Ashley for 87 performances in the Broadhurst Theatre.

PROGRAM

CAPTAIN DESIRI	Pittman Corry	CHRISTINE	Christine Ayres
FRANCESCA	Helene Le Berthon	HILDEGARDE	Jacqueline Susann
ROSA	Blanche Grady	LICETTA	Sue Ryan
CARMELA	Jackson Jordan	GASPARE	Earl McDonald
DR. BARTOLI	Jack Albertson	KILLER PEPOLI	Fred Catania
ISABELLA	Martha King	SECOND	Al Klein
SCAPINO	Bobby Morris	PANTALOON	Steve Mills
ANTHONY GASPAR	Arthur Maxwell	GHISELLA	Carole Landis
		PAGE BOY	Francelia Schmidt

SYNOPSIS: Prologue. Time 1945. Scene 1. Waiting room of a hospital. Scene 2. The operating room. Act I. Time 1545. Scene 1. A street in Venice. Scene 2. Ghisella's bedroom. Act II. Time 1545. Scene 1. Street in Venice. Scene 2. Garden of the Emperor of China. Scene 3. Hospital laboratory — Time 1945. Scene 4. A garden party, Washington, D. C.

CLAYTON ASHLEY is the pseudonym of Dr. Maxwell Maltz, a New York plastic surgeon whose performances in that branch of surgery, judging from his book, have included an unsuccessful operation to remove the *Sch* from his born surname. The doctor's writing kit is greasy with lard, and the lard is frequently mixed with dirt, and both are very hard on even a hokum stomach.

For his basic scheme the doctor, who incidentally supplied most of the money for the production of the show, has resorted to the rococo dream device of transporting modern characters back into a past century, which happily always allows any producer of an economical tendency to retrieve a lot of fancy old costumes from his theatrical warehouse, to

say nothing of sparing him the necessity of finding a quorum of chorus and show-girls with symmetrical legs. Superimposed upon the ancient scheme is the equally ancient superstition that a male's sexual virtuosity is predicated upon the size of his nose, which affords the doctor an opportunity to indulge in leers of pretended misunderstanding whenever a character utters such a word as "function."

The doctor's general idea of humor is, forsooth, something that should interest a colleague in the profession of taxidermy. "What is that you have on?" inquires a man of a woman clad in a filmy negligée. "A negligée," replies the latter. The man takes a long, hard look. "Negli-gee!" he exclaims. "I've been asked to get married many times," confides a woman. "So have I," replies another, "by the same people — my mother and father." A man hails a show-girl with "Oh, señorita!" "I am not a señorita, I am a señora," loftily allows the show-girl. "Who cares how you sleep?" retorts the man.

The fecundity of the doctor's wit takes such further forms as confusing Marco Polo with a game played on horses with sticks, alluding to the hair on a comedian's chest as tobacco and specifying it as Chesterfield, observing of a weakling who describes himself as Don Juan that he is Don Two, and replying to a query as to a taste for Kipling, "I don't know — I've never kippled." Let alone such forms as confounding Sir Walter Raleigh with a brand of cigarettes, observing of a woman's raucous voice that it is the Voice of the Turtle and of another's inappreciable rear that it is the Lost Weekend, stating that still another is not only medieval but evil, noting that yet still another whose job is a receptionist had not been known to be so receptive, and a female comic's reply to a description of her hair as being chestnut, her eyes hazel, and her complexion walnut, that she is the nuts.

The music of the show obviously derives its name solely from the circumstance that its sounds have been arbitrarily entrusted to a pit orchestra, and the lyrics have to do with such subjects as the dulness of life without caresses, the galvanizing effect of vitamins, the fact that it is the girl every-

time who counts, and the eccentricities of Brooklyn. And the costumes and scenery are strictly in the R. H. Burnside tradition.

If I have omitted anything, think up any derogatory descriptive adjectives you can, and you will be right.

The production marked the third stage appearance within ten days of a moving picture star in an important role, which did neither any of them nor the roles any good. The three were the Mary Astor and Neil Hamilton of the preceding chapter and here Carole Landis. Both Miss Astor and Miss Landis are visually attractive young women, the latter especially so; and Mr. Hamilton is also attractive in the characterless way that so many motion picture actors and actresses are. But it is to be feared, as earlier hinted, that when it comes to the business of acting, whether on the dramatic or musical stage, such screen favorites are far beyond their depth.

Miss Astor, for example, has a pleasant manner and conceivably with prolonged experience might develop into a serviceable actress, but as things stand she simply substitutes a likable screen personality for the somewhat more complicated craft of acting. A gay smile, however winning, is hardly a deceptive camouflage for a lack of inner comedic spirit; an air of *savoir faire* is not to be captured merely in nonchalant shoulder shruggings; and there must be more to a satisfactory projection of charm than speaking lines with a soft chuckle and the ability to play the piano.

Mr. Hamilton, to recapitulate and without further ado, is, as a stage actor, non-existent. Judging from his performance in the Kummer play, he apparently believes that dramatic acting is identical with the screen species and so contents himself with presenting his handsome profile to the audience, scrupulously following imaginary chalk marks about the stage, and reading his lines in a bleak monotone which a Hollywood "mixer," if present, might be relied upon to resolve into tones of a rich pear shape, worthy of Beerbohm Tree.

Miss Landis contributes to the musical show stage the considerable good looks noted and a figure not to be sneered

at, which, say what the solemn will, are something. But fears as to her other competences assail one. Her delivery of lines is agreeable enough, but her singing and motions toward dancing, it grieves one to report, since any such pretty creature invokes an uncritical chivalry, hardly constitute further stimulants to a stage already adorned by a number of such girls as Helena Bliss, Mary Martin, June Havoc, and the like.

The truth seems to be that the girls who have come on from Hollywood to try their luck in the theatre in the last few seasons have not been very fortunate. Of them all — and there has been a goodly freight of them — only Arleen Whelan, Virginia Gilmore, and K. T. Stevens among the younger ones have made any critical impression on the dramatic stage, and only Jan Clayton on the musical. Gwen Anderson, Wendy Barrie, Dolly Haas, Nancy Kelly, Florence Rice, Ilona Massey, Margaret Lindsay, Jeanne Cagney, Pert Kelton, Julie Warren, Marjorie Lord, Annabella, Patricia Morison, Margaret Hayes, and at least half a dozen others have come and gone without causing a ripple. A few of the older Hollywood women like Geraldine Fitzgerald who are generically stage actresses have critically fared somewhat better, but such as Joan Blondell, Glenda Farrell, and Miriam Hopkins have lost much of whatever share of earlier interest both criticism and their theatre public may have had in them. Even Mae West, though still showing some box-office life, appears doomed to the down-grade. And the simon-pure Hollywood ZaSu Pitts, after her little day in court, should keep her fingers crossed.

While actresses like Margaret Sullavan, Katharine Hepburn, Betty Field and Martha Scott, all primarily of the theatre rather than the screen, have held the theatre's affection, the last three seasons, along with the two that preceded them, have demonstrated rather clearly that the distance between Hollywood and the stage is far, and the road rocky. Phyllis Brooks, Elaine Shepard, Margaret Tallichet, Sally O'Neil, Helen Twelvetrees, Elsa Lanchester and Betty Furness have tried to cover it, and have dropped by the wayside. And so, too, have many otherwise nice girls like

Lila Lee, Heather Angel, Helene Reynolds, Mary Healy, Louise Stanley, Fay Wray, Rosemary Lane, Beverly Tyler, Lillian Bond, June Clyde, Irene Hervey, Mary Anderson, Luise Rainer, Elissa Landi, and Gloria Swanson. Where a single Jane Wyatt, Margo or, above all, Mary Martin has survived, a dozen have gone under. And in these exceptional cases it is usually the actress who has had stage training who is numbered among the survivors.

The reason for the failure of so many of the Hollywood actresses is hardly at this late date the basis of a particularly big news story. Some of them are blessed with all the desired physical attributes; some of them have good speaking voices; and some of them are not without the valuable quality that goes by the stereotyped term personality. But, while the camera has made them, the stage unmakes them. The two mediums, at least reading from right to left, are strangers. A stage actress thus has a much easier time in succeeding on the screen than a screen actress has on the stage, which has been sufficiently proved in the cases of many of them. The cinema is largely a process of external photography; the drama a process of inner. The stage actress so brings to the cinema that extra something, gained from dramatic experience, which adds just a little bit more to the cinema than it customarily enjoys and that, like an oversized tip to a cafeteria waiter, comes as an agreeable surprise, even if the waiter, or picture audience, can not quite understand the reason for it. The screen actress, on the other hand, most often brings to the stage only the outward characteristics and shadow of acting, and one will usually find that where occasionally a screen actress brings more than that she is essentially not really a screen actress at all but a stage actress who has wandered into the wrong medium, and has not, to boot, been overly successful in it.

LA VIE PARISIENNE. JANUARY 12, 1945

A new English version of the Jacques Offenbach operetta (first heard in Paris in 1866) by Felix Brentano and Louis Verneuil, with lyrics by Marian Farquhar. Produced by Yolanda Mero-Irion for the New Opera Company for 37 performances in the City Center Theatre.

PROGRAM

STATIONMASTER	Phillip George	EVELYN	Lillian Andersen
POLICEMAN	Roy Ballard	MR. HUTCHINSON	Arthur Newman
NEWSBOY	Irene E. Sherrock	PREMIERES {	Anna Istomina
FLOWER GIRL	Loretta Schere	DANSEUSES {	Elena Kramarr
COMTE RAOUL DE GARDEFEU	Brian Lawrence	PREMIER DANCER	James Lyons
BARON BOBINET	Edward Roecker	CUSTOMS {	Nicholas J. Insardi
METELLA	Marion Carter	INSPECTORS {	Sylvan Evans
GONTRAN	Lee Edwards	GABRIELLE	Frances Watkins
JACKSON	David Morris	ALPHONSE	Lee Edwards

SYNOPSIS: *The action takes place in Paris in spring, between 1880 and 1890. Act I. A railway station, in the evening. Act II. Scene 1. Three days later — salon at Gardefeu's house, in the late afternoon. Scene 2. The following evening — the famous private banquet room at the fashionable Cafe Anglais. Act III. Later the same night at Gardefeu's salon.*

ON NOVEMBER 28, 1944, the City Center offered for an engagement of three weeks Johann Strauss' *The Gypsy Baron*. Through mental processes not difficult to penetrate, it offered it to the attention of music critics rather than theatre critics, since while the music of *The Gypsy Baron* is charming the book hardly exercises enough charm to fascinate even the least of what the late Percy Hammond described as contented rattlesnakes. Through mental processes rather more difficult to penetrate, the City Center offered this revival of the Offenbach operetta to theatre critics rather than their music brothers. Since the book, while not entirely so dismal as that of *The Gypsy Baron*, was even in its first incarnation pretty bad and since it was in this re-

incarnation still less virtuous and since, further, the music remains the one asset the exhibit enjoys, the aforesaid difficulty may be appreciated.

The production of *The Gypsy Baron* was in all respects shabby; the production of *La Vie Parisienne*, with which the New Opera Company had toyed before, was somewhat better. But, though relatively better, it still left much to be prayed for by those persons who had seen the operetta in some of its presentations in Europe. The new version of the book, which always has needed liberal cutting, suffered from witless hands; its attempts at humorous modernization went even to the absurd extent of allusions to Oshkosh and the Republican party. The staging by Ralph Herbert, fairly expert in the first act, thereafter descended to concluding a duet number by having the male singers deject themselves with merry exhaustion upon a couch, to having the members of a comical quartette alternately step forward out of the line and coyly beam the lyrics at the audience, to converting the famous Can-Can number into a hybrid ballet, and to serving the champagne in the Café Anglais scene out of what very evidently were beer bottles. Several of the actors and actresses whose English speech was of a distinctly suburban timbre became suddenly such purists when called upon to enunciate a French word and delivered themselves so elegantly of "frah" for "franc" and "cawh" for "compte" that the effect was hilarious sub-Berlitz. And the musical arrangements by Antal Dorati, which too frequently by senseless way of trying to liven up an already lively enough score determinedly recast some of the music into a monotonously overworked *allegriSSimo*, depressed the proceedings further. Offenbach, though in this operetta himself not always free from monotony, does not need help from Mr. Dorati.

The most interesting person on the stage was the relative newcomer, Lillian Andersen, in the role of the daughter of the American millionaire. Miss Andersen has both beauty and voice, though her studiously elaborate labial formations in the delivery of higher notes occasionally detract from the former.

One of the music critics, under the spell of several of the Offenbach compositions, delivered himself of an extensive testimonial to the power of music generally over the mental faculties of mankind and to its stimulation of the higher cerebral centers. This is one of the theories that it has always entertained me to scrutinize. That music inspires one to profound and lofty thoughts, many of them of competitive rank with Hegel, Kant and Herbert Spencer, is a theory assuaging to aesthetics, but I fear that it is prettier than true. Great music may instil in one an awe and respect for its composer but, beyond that, the meditations it gives birth to are generally less transcendent and metaphysical than mundane, and of a philosophical, ethical, and even romantic bulk not materially greater than those generated by a half-pint of good Scotch whiskey. As for inferior music, which constitutes about nine-tenths of the tonal art, if one doesn't dance one either goes to sleep and dreams dreams far beyond the imaginations of its artificers or loudly demands more alcohol to drown out the aural and mental torture.

Music in the aggregate, in point of mathematical fact, does not, aside from a great critical satisfaction and pleasure in the best of it, provide the imagination with half the blooms and fertile fields vouchsafed by malt and the grape; and what cerebral exercises it induces, compared with those of the latter, are both in essence and expansiveness relatively puny. Its gifts to the cerebrum are mainly those of remembrance or wistful speculation on the present and future. In its spell one thinks of such sentimental trivia as a woman loved and lost, some beautiful creature whom one knows damned well one will never achieve, or the theoretically happy days that are gone and the theoretically happy ones to come. On rare occasions the mind may be inspired to take a slightly more trenchant flight, but in the main all that music contributes to the psyche is a philosophical sedative which comfortably reassures idiots of the virtue of their idiocy and reconciles wiser men to their lack of emotional pragmatism.

The effect of music, even great music, upon the human

brain is in no better way to be appreciated than by observing the results in the instance of most musicians and orchestra conductors. With probably not more than three exceptions at most, no conspicuous musician or maestro has ever given the slightest evidence that his art had inculcated in him thoughts above those of a twelve-year-old child or has ever made a single remark which indicated that his imagination had been inspired beyond the capacity of that of a bass drummer. Consider, on the other hand, the mere mint julep. After the first, the mind proceeds to dredge up from nowhere any number of piquant ideas: choice epigrams, hitherto unanswered telephone numbers that offer a challenge to realistic romance, sidelights on the political philosophies of such old Southern colonels as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe, the influence upon their illustrious husbands of such Dixie belles as Martha Custis, Martha Skelton, Rachel Robarts, and Letitia Christian, the psychological impulses in the philosophy of Benedetto Croce, and the part valuably played by alcoholic spirits in the campaigns of Octavius Caesar, William of Orange, and General Jacob S. Coxey.

After the second, and after a continued resolute assault on the telephone numbers, comes a period of rosy tranquillity wherein the mind gives life to a repertoire of sauceful considerations: that America, for all its cultural progress, still refuses to accept at his full value any critic like the late James Huneker simply because he looked upon the wine when it was red and the women when they were pink and reserves its fullest approval for inferior critics like the late Stuart Sherman who in ex-officio life were immaculate stuffed-shirts; that in the happiest period of his life Beethoven wrote *Fidelio*, one of his poorest jobs, whereas in the most troubled he produced the great *Ninth Symphony*; that the lowbrow who wrote such flubdub as "Walter Scott is a great genius," "The Chinese think, act and feel almost exactly like ourselves," and "Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* is the most abominable book that was ever written" was none other than Goethe; and that most of the greatest loves in history, contrary to the established philosophy of amour,

involved little or no respect on the part of either of the principals.

After the third julep, one is besieged by ideas like the one which constitutes this meditation, which at its worst may possibly be granted to be at least slightly more tinctorial than any six ideas generated by anything that Mendelssohn ever wrote.

HEDGEROW THEATRE REPERTOIRE

JANUARY 16, 1945

A month's program of plays from the repertoire of the Moylan, Pennsylvania, little theatre group. Produced in the Cherry Lane Theatre.

PRINCIPALS

Jasper Deeter, Miriam Phillips, Arthur Rich, Catherine Rieser, Mahlon Naill, Elsie Winocour, Rose Schulman, Thomas Meigs, Arthur Hanson, Audrey Ward, Helen Alexander, Dan Christman, Joseph Leberman, Kenneth Carter.

THE HEDGEROW THEATRE was founded twenty-two years ago by Jasper Deeter and in that period has produced one hundred and fifty-five plays, thirty-nine of them new and presented by the organization for the first time. With the Pennsylvania countryside roads closed by the heavy winter snows and with sufficient gasoline unavailable even when they were open, the worthy little band of players emigrated to New York to display their wares in more commodious surroundings and opened in the remote Greenwich Village section of the city on a night that for snow-choked roads and stalled cars was as defeating as any they had experienced in their native Rose Valley.

The opening production was Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, first produced in New York a quarter-century ago. This was followed by a new play by Jack Kinnard called *Tomorrow's Yesterday*, another new play by the young Mexican, Ramon Naya, called *Quintin Quintana*, and by Jean Black's dramatization of the Christopher Morley novel, *Thunder On The Left*, originally produced by the Hedgerow players in 1929 and subsequently seen in the New York theatre in 1933. The O'Neill play, one of his best, is too well known to need further comment. The Kinnard play, its 22-year-old author's first produced work, purports to be a study of typical, everyday American life and is

so overly verbose and badly muddled a mixture of realism and symbolism that it constantly trips over itself. The Naya exhibit is described by its sponsors as dealing with "a young and vital Mexico invaded and exploited by predatory pseudo-sophistication from the States," and further showing "old Mexico's new youth and vitality attacked by the cancer of a dying culture which bores from within." The author, whose *Mexican Mural* was produced in New York in 1942, here again indicates a measure of descriptive talent but also once again the lack of a sufficient dramaturgical knowledge to convert it into valid theatre. He is also given unnecessarily to obscenity. The Black-Morley fantasy, a child's-eye view of adults, offers some humorous observation and a measure of originality that constitute it often likable pastime.

All the productions were largely of an amateur quality, yet the fundamental spirit and the enterprise of Mr. Deeter's organization can not but call upon one's respect. With negligible means at his disposal, he has steadfastly carried on in what he believes to be the better interests of an American theatre for more than two decades and, if his achievements have not always been able to compete with the professional stage, they at least have occasionally been worth-while and deserving of a hospitable suspension of too critical judgment.

GOOD NIGHT LADIES. JANUARY 17, 1945

An adaptation by Cyrus Wood of the Avery Hopwood-Charlton Andrews farce, Ladies' Night In A Turkish Bath, presented by A. H. Woods 25 years ago. Produced by Howard Lang and Al Rosen for 78 performances in the Royale Theatre.

PROGRAM

MARIE	Rosemary Bertrand	MRS. BLANCHE O'BRIEN
DODIE TARLETON	Randee Sanford	Ann Fortney
KITTIE BONNER	Sunnie O'Dea	Lucille Benson
MIKE BONNER	Skeets Gallagher	Louise Jarvis
MRS. THERESA TARLETON	Kathryn Givney	Lana Holmes
ALICIA BLAKE	Marlo Dwyer	Beatrice Newport
FRED BLAKE	Max Hofmann, Jr.	Wendell Ates
PROF. JOHN MATTHEWS	James Ellison	

SYNOPSIS: Act I. The Bonner apartment. Early evening. Act II. The Cosmetarium. Several hours later. Act III. Same as Act I, 2:30 a.m. Time. Present.

PERCEIVING that his cargo of minsky, *School For Brides* (*q.v.*) , was to the taste of the New York box-office, Mr. Lang, assisted in this instance by one Rosen, reconsidered his qualms as to that other cargo of the same called *Good Night Ladies*, which had prospered inordinately in Chicago and other thitherward communities, and brought it into the metropolis as soon as he could persuade its author to play safe by adding to it a few more bad jokes. While not as smutty as the earlier *coup*, it is even duller, if that be possible, relying for its humor as it does upon the antiquated theme of a pair of men lying themselves into a gay night off from their wives, being caught in a raid upon the scene of their frolic, and thereafter exerting themselves in one fashion or another to avoid detection by their mates. The theme was such a favorite in the theatre of France and Germany sev-

enty-five years ago that it was a rare season that did not merchant several treatments of it. And it was not many years after that that it began to appear on the American stage almost annually either in adaptations of the French and German farces or in paraphrases of them, sometimes from the hand of Leo Ditrichstein, sometimes from that of George Broadhurst, and now and then from that of some less well known theatrical artisan of the period.

The present version has been culled from the Hopwood-Andrews farce noted, which in turn had been culled basically from such farces as *It Happened To Jones*, which in double turn had been culled from numerous French and German predecessors. It has been vulgarized into the worst kind of drivel imaginable; it has no single moment of genuine humor; and its presented spectacle of semi-nude females comporting themselves like bootleg burlesque queens is less than edifying. The whole has been patently designed to gratify that portion of the theatrical trade which believes that a woman is not an actress unless she takes her clothes off on the stage and that humor is not humor unless it involves a male dressed up as a female. If the male thus garbed then smears some cold cream on his face and to his horror is apprised by the woman thus ungarbed that it is a depilatory, the trade in point prepares to have the time of its life. And if a moment later he is laid out on a massage slab and a whizzing dimpling needle applied to his behind, to its anguished contortions, the trade can not contain itself.

As further samples of the author's wit there are such lines as "I have adored you from afar" — "Oh, I see; remote control"; "Women are a closed book to me" — "All you need is a paper-cutter"; "I'm afraid I'm old-fashioned" — "Yes, just one Old-fashioned after another"; and, upon a woman's saucy remark, the admonition, "Remember, there are men present!"

The speech of the acting personnel took such contours as "Saracuse" for Syracuse, "genius" for genus, and the cultured like.

REBECCA. JANUARY 18, 1945

A dramatization by Daphne Du Maurier of her novel of the same title. Produced by Victor Payne-Jennings for 20 performances in the Ethel Barrymore Theatre.

PROGRAM

FRITH	<i>Richard Temple</i>	MRS. DE WINTER	<i>Diana Barrymore</i>
BEATRICE LACY	<i>Margaret Bannerman</i>	MAID	<i>Jacqueline Max</i>
MAJOR GILES LACY	<i>Franklyn Fox</i>	ROBERT	<i>Kenneth Treseder</i>
FRANK CRAWLEY	<i>Claude Horton</i>	MRS. DANVERS	<i>Florence Reed</i>
MAXIM DE WINTER	<i>Bramwell Fletcher</i>	JACK FAVELL	<i>George Baxter</i>
		COL. JULYAN	<i>Reginald Mason</i>
		WILLIAM TABB	<i>Edgar Kent</i>

SYNOPSIS: The action of the play takes place in the southern end of the hall at Manderley, the home of Maxim de Winter, in Cornwall, England, some years before the present war. Act I. Scene 1. Early evening in May. Scene 2. Morning, six weeks later. Act II. Scene 1. Evening, the same day. Scene 2. 4 a.m. the following morning. Act III. Scene 1. Afternoon, the same day. Scene 2. Early evening, two days later.

THE PLAY SUGGESTS nothing quite so much as Laura Jean Libbey bound in half-Morocco. All the fancy stage trapplings can not conceal the essential Libbey materials: the faithless first wife, the young second wife brought to the grand manor house, the sinister housekeeper, the drowning of the first wife and the suspicions of murder, the scoundrelly blackmailer, etc., etc. The novel succeeded in concealing them to a degree, but in the play manufactured from it the pseudo-psychological elements have been reduced to a miscellaneous melodramatic furrowing of brows, the spectre of the defunct first wife that haunts the second becomes merely a kind of Harvey with a villainous false black mustache, the sinister housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, at least as acted by Florence Reed, is Mother Goddam directly out of *The Shanghai Gesture*, and the exhibit as a whole has an aspect of something out of the remote *East Lynne*-*Jane Eyre* stock company period.

The plot is doubtless familiar to you from the novel or, if you are given to the cinema, from the picture made from it. Charles Garvice brings to his great house in Cornwall a second wife in the person of a young girl named Bertha M. Clay. The house, like Garvice's mind, is haunted by the memory of the deceased first wife, whose name was Augusta J. Evans. Garvice's obsession slowly tortures Bertha out of her wits, her profound discomfort not being lessened by the acts of Augusta's vicious and still loyal old housekeeper, Mrs. Alex McVeigh Miller. It presently develops that Garvice murdered Augusta because she had been unfaithful to him and that it is hate not love that envelops his memory of her. A knave named E. Phillips Oppenheim who was Augusta's lover and who is aware of Garvice's guilt now seeks to extract funds from him and, rebuffed, tells all. But in the end Garvice goes free, Bertha is released from her prolonged agony, and a jolly neighbor named Mary J. Holmes helps to celebrate the occasion with the happily reunited couple. The manor house is not burned to the ground in the play as it was in the novel, probably because it would have taken an extra 3,000 dollars to buy the rights to Langdon McCormick's old stage fire effect.

As Garvice, Bramwell Fletcher indicated his overpowering mental perturbation mainly by pacing the stage with a slouched right shoulder and by keeping his eyes glued to his succession of faultlessly creased trousers. As Bertha M. Clay, Miss Barrymore was tortured not only by the spectre of Garvice's first wife but by some very poor playwriting and by direction that kept her for a large share of the evening simply standing around with an air of injured innocence and watching the other actors, which was not exactly a treat.

The play, despite its failure in New York because of bad casting and acting, was a great box-office success on the road and seemed to indicate once again that little perhaps remains more satisfying to the American theatre public at large, and to the metropolitan at least nine times out of ten, than what the pure in soul deem to be deplorable, highly immoral, or worse. Maxim de Winter, completely unsympathetic to audiences in the earlier portion of *Rebecca*,

promptly became an object of the deepest sympathy upon his statement that he had murdered his first wife, and audiences, including New York's, were furthermore wholeheartedly on his side against the forces of the law that sought to trap him. The enormous popular success of *Harvey* is due in no small degree to its warm defense of alcoholic indulgence. The prosperity of *I Remember Mama* is predicated to an almost equal degree upon the character of an old boozer with a mistress. The trash, *School For Brides*, achieved a long run on the score of its sexual misdemeanors, and Mae West's *Catherine Was Great* was kept going for many months by the spectacle of its heroine's miscellaneous gay affairs.

The one and only scene in the claptrap, *The Perfect Marriage*, which garnered the audiences' sympathy was that wherein the husband tried to negotiate another woman upon whom he had lodged an illicit eye. The dubious *The Searching Wind* humanizes its icy stuffed-shirt of a protagonist for the audience only when it becomes known that some years before he had allowed love to take its biological course. Without its character of the philandering Alexander Craig, *Soldier's Wife* could hardly have gained the popular trade that it did. And the anatomically suppressed but mink-eyed Emily in *Snafu* went a long way toward guaranteeing the box-office in the case of that play.

The sympathetic heroine of the great hit, *Anna Lucasta*, is a prostitute, and the ditto of that even greater hit, *The Voice Of The Turtle*, takes love where she finds it. *Chicken Every Sunday* is a riot with the public largely because of its unquenchable nymphomaniac and other glandularly effervescent characters. *Arsenic And Old Lace*, that gold-mine, makes murder lovable, and I don't have to tell you about that other gold-mine, *Tobacco Road*. *Lovers And Friends*, dreadful rubbish, managed a considerable run on the score of its husband's and wife's extra-marital peccadillos, and *Wallflower's* heroine was a girl who learned that the way to be popular with the boys was, well, to be popular with them — and who put her lesson into practise. The delinquent little heroine of *Pick-Up Girl* had audiences weeping copi-

ous tears for her. And many of the hit musical shows' most successful elements have been and are situations and songs that would cause a pious bartender to fear for his soul.

But this is no new development in the theatre. The theatre provides an escape and a holiday for people ordinarily circumspect, and when people, however punctilious, go on a picnic they do not want to be given the day in and day out family oatmeal. An appetite-stimulating dill pickle, a sandwich spiced with anchovy paste, a swig out of a flask is more to their taste, and plays and shows that cater cleverly to their wayward palates reap the reward. The average person who goes to the theatre sniffs a little mental cocaine and sticks a carnation into his heart on the way. It is so now as it has been so for time on end.

It is thus that Marguerite Gautier and Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford, Iris Bellamy and Arsène Lupin, Don Juan, Du Barry, Peck's Bad Boy and all the other sinners big and little have held an attraction for audiences that in most instances has been irresistible, even when the plays that have included them have been nothing to brag about. The Cinderellas and Peg o' My Hearts, the Little Lord Fauntleroys and Rudolf Rassendylls have held and still hold their places too, but when all is said and done they can not for a moment oust from the affectionate admiration of the body politic the knaves and the rascals, the heart-loose ladies, and the flouters of conventional morality in general.

Of the fifty-odd plays that have achieved the longest stage runs in our more modern American theatre, the greater proportion, by way of evidence, have fascinated audiences with themes and characters that would be spanked, to say the very least, in the audiences' homes. They have dealt sympathetically with everything from miscegenation to murder, untrammeled sex to criminal enterprise, and moral revolt to delirium tremens, or its equivalent. They have made a virtue of shiftlessness, as in *Lightnin'*, of lack of thrift, as in *You Can't Take It With You*, of acid meanness, as in *The Women*, and of wantonness, as in *Rain*. They have made entrancing the characters of crooks and thieves and killers, as in *The Bat*, *Within The Law*, *Broadway*, and

Angel Street; they have made sinful love romantic, as in *White Cargo* and *Strictly Dishonorable*; they have made nock of sexual morality, as in *Boy Meets Girl*, *The Dough-irls*, and *Separate Rooms*; and they have broken most of he Commandments in the combined cases of *Tobacco Road*, *My Sister Eileen*, *The Children's Hour*, *Dead End*, *Street Scene*, *Kiki*, *Personal Appearance*, *Sailor, Beware!*, and a dozen others.

And the bulk of our thoroughly respectable fellow-citizens has loved them.

It is to be gravely feared, accordingly, that the great body of our theatregoers is not always on the side of the gods. A grievous and depressing thought, but true, alas, nonetheless. The great body of our theatregoers would seem, in point of fact, to be something of a heel. In its eyes the representatives of moral order and decency are frequently objects to be scoffed at, ridiculed, and profoundly disliked. The character of the young man in *Dear Ruth*, for example, who stands for the conventions, who believes that a man's fiancée should not go about necking with strangers, and who hopes to build a home and family is looked upon as an odious ass. And the father in *Anna Lucasta*, for another, who doesn't relish the idea of his daughter being a waterfront whore and tells his family that he doesn't like to have her around his orderly house is regarded as an objectional person and as even something of a villain.

As in days gone by, it is the girl with illegitimate child or her equivalent who is simultaneously driven out into the snow and into the hearts of the audience.

It isn't, as may be thought, that human nature is generally for the underdog; in the theatre it is not only for the underdog but for any kind of dog, particularly mutt. The dramatic gallery of rakes, scoundrels, and jades who have captivated audiences would fill a book. It has embraced crooks like Jim the Penman, Raffles and Jimmy Valentine; strumpets like Laura Murdock, Lulu Belle and Anna Christie; libertines like Chevrial and the gay Lord Quex; drunks like Falstaff, Joxer and Fluther Good; vixens like Hedda and Regina Giddens; loose fish like Magda, Rose Bernd and

Paula Tanqueray; murderers like Killer Mears, and wastrels like Rip, and cadgers like Haji the beggar of Bagdad, and a thousand other such sports and sinners. And the public, to repeat, has adored them.

And, incidentally, much of the time I have been part of that lamentable public.

 HOME IS THE HERO. JANUARY 18, 1945

A play by Courtenay Savage. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 23 performances in the Blackfriars' Guild Theatre.

PROGRAM

TILLIE BAYLIS	Ella Playwin	Ivy WOODMAN	Dorothy Buquo
JOY HARRIS	Kate Gibbons	JERRY MERRILL	Harold Heagy
JOE KELLY	David Bell	MARY FISHER	Beth Shea
JOAN SCOTT	Laura McClure	RAY KELLY	Richard Corby
ANN GARDNER	Miriam Galley	FRED KELLY	Robert Echlin
FRANCES MERRILL	Virginia Dwyer		

SYNOPSIS: The action takes place in the living-hall of a Los Angeles mansion which has been converted into a war-time rooming house. Act I. Late afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. Two weeks later; early evening. Scene 2. Two weeks later; the dinner hour. Act III. A week later (Sunday morning).

IT IS NOT EASY to determine why the Blackfriars' Guild, which is dedicated to the experimental drama, for the second successive time in a season resorted to the kind of play to which lesser Broadway producers so often in turn dedicate themselves, and to no profit. Mr. Savage in the past has been a big source of supply to such producers with hapless trade goods like *Don't Bother Mother*, *Virtue's Bed*, *The Buzzard*, *The Queen At Home*, and *Loose Moments*, all routine fare and scarcely contributing to any noticeable elevation of either the drama or the box-office. This, his latest effort, is hardly more propitious.

For his theme, Mr. Savage has not too originally had recourse to the problems of the returned married soldier, involving, as usual, his difficulties in readjusting himself to family life, his wife's determination to pursue the working career she has entered upon in his long absence, and so on. Though he has set himself to view the subject more seriously than, for example, Rose Franken in *Soldier's Wife* (q.v.), he has succeeded in getting no appreciable distance

and a tidal wave of garrulity overwhelms and drowns what drama the topic may conceivably possess. Instead of dramatizing his materials, he simply reduces them to endless colloquies between the soldier and his mate, which leave his other characters in the position of supers idly standing around, without spears. The colloquies, moreover, consist of the fully anticipated ingredients and the attempt to lend them an air of importance by pitching them in an indignant key only converts them into so many audience bivouacs.

A GOOSE FOR THE GANDER

JANUARY 23, 1945

A comedy by Harold J. Kennedy. Produced by Jules J. Leventhal and Frank McCoy for 15 performances in the Playhouse.

PROGRAM

DAVID	Conrad Nagel	KATHERINE	Gloria Swanson
SUZY	Maxine Stuart	JONATHAN	John Clubley
LORRAINE	Choo Choo Johnson	CHAUFFEUR	George Margolis
BENSON	Joyce Stroba	WALLY	David Tyrrell
TONY	Harold J. Kennedy		

SYNOPSIS: Entire action of the play takes place in the living-room of David Richardson's home in Greenwich, Conn. Time is the present. Act I. Scene 1. Noon. Scene 2. Late that afternoon. Act II. Scene 1. After dinner, the same evening. Scene 2. Three hours later. Act III. Late the same evening.

THE PLAYHOUSE holds eight hundred and sixty-five people. On the opening night eight hundred and sixty-five people duly filled the house but only two people had a good time and they, unfortunately, were not members of the audience. They were on the stage and their names were Gloria Swanson and Harold J. Kennedy. There were also seven other people on the stage, but they didn't seem to be having any better time than the eight hundred and sixty-five on the other side of the footlights.

Miss Swanson, still another and the latest movie actress to challenge the drama, was apparently in clover, though scarcely in the direction of anything that might be said even remotely to have approached acting. She occupied a role, especially manufactured for her, which had four different men so crazy about her intellectual qualities, beauty, and sex appeal that they could hardly stand it. She privileged herself a succession of costumes by Valentina that were calculated, she felt sure, to drive the women in the

audience even crazier than the aforesaid four men. She had herself a held-up grand first entrance, preceded by servants carrying on enough expensive luggage to serve an operatic version of Joseph Schildkraut, which was designed to make the audience even still crazier with anticipation than either the four men or the aforesaid women. And so on. She had herself, in short, one hell of a time.

Mr. Kennedy, who not only wrote the play but bequeathed himself a choice role in it, was not far behind Miss Swanson in a consuming happiness. He gave himself all the so-to-speak best gags; he pictured himself as a boyish lover bursting with ineffable charm; he insinuated himself elaborately into the action with the subtlety of a freight locomotive; and so on. He swam in self-delight.

For everybody else the evening was something pretty grisly.

The play was a dreary paraphrase of the kind of comedies in which Grace George used frequently to appear years ago which, when they weren't *Divorçons*, were such dreary paraphrases of it as *Sauce For The Gander* and the like. You can always tell what you are in for in these cases when you look at the cover on the program showing a husband and wife at a breakfast table with the wife about to pour the coffee and the husband kissing her hand. You know that the husband has been fooling around with another woman, that the wife will pretend to fool around with another man by way of bringing him around again, and that the coffee will duly be poured at eleven o'clock, indicating mutual understanding and happy reconciliation. You also know that, among other things, the dialogue will embrace such reflections on marriage as "Once the fish is caught, why bother about the bait?"; that there will be a scene in which the wife gets pleasantly tipsy on champagne; that she will at one point in the proceedings demonstrate that she can play the piano; and that in the end the husband will prove to her satisfaction that his affair with the other woman was purely platonic. So why wait for the coffee?

THE TEMPEST. JANUARY 25, 1945

A Margaret Webster staging of the fantasy by William Shakespeare, with music by David Diamond. Produced by Cheryl Crawford for 100 performances in, initially, the Alvin Theatre.

PROGRAM

SHIP-MASTER	Joseph Hardy	CALIBAN	Canada Lee
BOATSWAIN	Steven Elliott	FERDINAND, PRINCE OF NAPLES	Vito Christi
ALONZO, KING OF NAPLES	Philip Huston	ADRIAN	Jack Bostick
GONZALO	Paul Leyssac	TRINCULO	George Voskovec
ANTONIO	Berry Kroeger	STEPHANO	Jan Werich
SEBASTIAN	Eugene Stuckmann	MASTER OF CEREMONIES	Larry Evers
PROSPERO	Arnold Moss	DANCER	Diana Sinclair
MIRANDA	Frances Heflin		
ARIEL	Vera Zorina		

The Prologue. *On a ship at sea.*
The Play. *On an island.*

MISS WEBSTER's production was to be strongly recommended as a valuable education in what, at least partly, a production of *The Tempest* should not be. That it impressed and even enchanted the groundlings was, however, obvious, since it offered the novelty of a beautiful ballerina in the role of Ariel and a well-known Negro ex-prize-fighter in that of Caliban, and since it made use of a Joe Cook revolving stage which as always guaranteed a rapt fascination on the part of those more innocent theatregoers who are never so interested as when such mechanical stage trickery substitutes for drama played on a floor which remains disappointingly quiescent. That it further impressed audiences who had appreciated the play chiefly from hearsay was also clear, since Miss Webster had on at least two previous occasions demonstrated herself to be an expert in deception in the case of the numerous people who believe

that, whether in drama or vaudeville, you can actually saw a woman in half even if not long afterward she jumps out of the box *in toto* and laughs them off for a lot of come-ons. What was still more, her exhibit fetched even some who knew the play well but who remain so overly susceptible to any gestures toward eccentric staging and unconventional casting that they mistake them for a vital and indeed very intellectual interpretation of the play itself.

Miss Webster knows her Shakespeare and is generally a woman of uncommon intelligence. But it is this uncommon intelligence that is now and then her undoing. Like many another cerebrally gifted person, her very intelligence induces in her a restlessness and impatience which arbitrarily impel her to be discontented with any conventional and perfectly sound interpretation of the play in hand and which drive her through sheer, though understandable, perversity to satisfy her ego in an interpretation somewhat more capricious and less recognizable, and not always, alas, above suspicion.

That perversity doubtless caused her in the present instance to stage the Shakespearean classic not in the manner which her calm intelligence convinced her it should be staged, but rather in a manner that might profitably persuade others of less intelligence that she was intellectually independent, inventive and very progressive, at which she herself, at least on this occasion, must have permitted herself a private smile. She is fundamentally much too wise not to appreciate that the less stage hocus-pocus one visits upon any such fantasy, the fuller the play upon the imagination that fantasy, so richly worded, will exercise. That she indulged in such hocus-pocus was therefore surely a concession to the uncritical box-office and to those many persons who want, above everything else, what they call a show.

It is perfectly true that such a show has been made of *The Tempest* in the past. Furthermore, there are arguments of a sort for making it one. But those arguments are certainly not the kind that would ever really persuade Miss Webster or anyone else with her Shakespearean critical

sense. The fact accordingly remains that she sacrificed that good critical sense in this case to the business of Broadway showmanship.

Even if we give her the benefit of the doubt, her position in the matter was debatable. She contended in the public prints that not only are fancy stage garnishes traditional in the presentation of *The Tempest*, but that they are valuable in furthering the spirit of the fantasy. Well, let us grant for the sake of argument that they are. Granting that they are, it must then nevertheless be allowed that they must be as fancifully beautiful and as poetically persuasive as Shakespeare's fantasy itself. And that is just where Miss Webster, among other things, fell down, though perhaps through no direct fault of her own.

You can not properly adorn and embellish *The Tempest* as it should be adorned and embellished — still granting that it calls for any such carpentered ornamentation — for a mere 50,000 dollars, which was reported to be the amount of the present investment. To do it as well and as richly as it should be done — again assuming that it should be done at all — would require at least twice that amount, if not more. It costs from 30,000 to 40,000 dollars these days to put on even a simple one-set play in any fully reputable manner. To put on *The Tempest* as a real show for 50,000 is therefore in the current situation the dream of a producer and director living back in 1920 or thereabout. It can not be done.

It would consequently have been much better had Miss Webster permitted her intelligence as to the fantasy to function normally and to have staged it as unmechanically as well she knows for its finer effect it should be staged. As it was, those 50,000 dollars took at least a 35,000 toll of what should have been and is the play's intrinsic magic and loveliness.

Miss Webster, oddly enough, was praised in various quarters for the "simplicity" of her staging. The praise was difficult to understand, since, while she abandoned a lot of painted settings and some of the old accessories, the completely bogus nature of that simplicity was to be appreci-

ated in her affected employment of a rotary stage built up to several levels and carrying a succession of enough stairs to serve the Maxim's scenes in half a dozen *The Merry Widows* and enough bizarre architectures, ostensibly indicating various localities on the enchanted island but looking more like bombed French cathedrals, Aztec ruins and Arizona florists' cacti displays, to constitute a year-book of the Schurz Evening Junior College's classes in design. Her so-called simplicity thus took the form of substituting an intricate and distracting mechanical device for the more conventional much less intricate and entirely less distracting canvas backgrounds.

"The poetry of *The Tempest* is so magical that it would make the scenery of a modern theatre ridiculous," once wrote Shaw. The poetry of *The Tempest* is so magical that it makes the imposition upon it of the mechanical contraptions of the yet more modern theatre even more ridiculous. The Bard and a merry-go-round, particularly any such Rube Goldberg merry-go-round as Miss Webster made use of, do not jell. To the poet, as Shaw said, should be left the work of conjuring up the isle "full of noises, sounds and sweet airs." The noises and sounds made by a heavily bedizened revolving stage are hardly conducive to sweet airs. "The reason is," concluded Shaw, "not that a man can always imagine things more vividly than art can present them to him, but that it takes an altogether extraordinary degree of art to compete with the pictures which the imagination makes when it is stimulated by such potent forces as the maternal instinct, superstitious awe, or the poetry of Shakespeare."

Miss Webster eliminated the old transformation scenes with their scrims and wires and other properties, but in their place gave us something quite as destructive to the poetic atmosphere of the play in the shape of whirligigs elaborately wound 'round with stairways down which one momentarily expected to behold a parade of Earl Carroll show-girls, at least.

It is time that modern stage producers let Shakespeare well enough alone. What with Reinhardt having converted

his *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into a cross between the Vendome's show-windows and the Hanlon Brothers' *Fantasma*, what with Piscator having turned his *King Lear* into an acrobatic exhibition atop what resembled one of the loftier Swiss Alps, and what with other such producers both dead and alive having been and being still intent less upon staging him than themselves, the poor fellow, viewing the results from the grave, must wonder if his plays must not, after all, have been the work of Bacon.

The acting performances varied from the Shakespearean of Arnold Moss as Prospero, Philip Huston as Alonso and Paul Leyssac as Gonzalo to the George Abbott of a number of the others, and in the case of the clowns, Trinculo and Stephano, save for the absence of pistols and blank cartridges, to the Olsen and Johnson. Vera Zorina's Ariel remained a professional ballet dancer imitating an airy spirit; airy spirits are not in our imaginations so studiously concerned with making every little physical movement, in the language of the song, have a meaning of its own. Canada Lee's Caliban was in part effectively projected, though his ceaseless heavy nasal breathing, presumably intended to indicate savage perturbation, occasionally lent to the portrayal the suggestion of his having swallowed a toy steam engine.

What, in short, emerged from the Webster *The Tempest* with its surplusage of noisy mechanical appurtenances amid which the poetry, like a dreaming child forlornly wandered astray in a nut and bolt factory, was lost was less the impression of William Shakespeare than of Henry J. Kaiser, let alone the impression of a nocturne staged and largely played like a jazzed dirge.

UP IN CENTRAL PARK. JANUARY 27, 1945

A musical comedy, book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, music by Sigmund Romberg. Produced by Michael Todd for a far beyond the season run in the Century Theatre.

P R O G R A M

A LABORER	Bruce Lord	JOE STEWART	Fred Barry
DANNY O'CAHANE	Walter Burke	PORTER	Harry Matlock
TIMOTHY MOORE	Charles Irwin	LOTTA STEVENS	Delma Byron
BESSIE O'CAHANE	Betty Bruce	FANNY MORRIS	Kay Griffith
ROSIE MOORE	Maureen Cannon	CLARA MANNING	Martha Burnett
JOHN MATTHEWS	Wilbur Evans	JAMES FISK, JR.	Watson White
THOMAS NAST	Maurice Burke	DANIEL	Daniel Nagrin
WILLIAM DUTTON	John Quigg	GOVERNESS	Louise Holden
ANDREW MONROE	Robert Field	1ST CHILD	Ann Hermann
VINCENT PETERS	Paul Reed	2D CHILD	Joan Lally
MAYOR A. OAKLEY HALL		3D CHILD	Janet Lally
	Rowan Tudor	4TH CHILD	Mary Alice Evans
RICHARD CONNOLLY	George Lane	PAGE BOY	Henry Capri
PETER SWEENEY	Harry Meehan	ARTHUR FINCH	Wally Coyle
WILLIAM MARCEY	TWEED	ELLEN LAWRENCE	Elaine Barry
	Noah Beery, Sr.	BICYCLE RIDER	Stanley Schimmel
BUTLER	Herman Glazer	GEORGE JONES	Guy Standing, Jr.
MILDRED WINCOR	Lydia Fredericks		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. A site in Central Park (June, 1870). Scene 2. The Park Commissioner's temporary office in Central Park (July, 1870). Scene 3. The lounge of the Stetson Hotel (formerly McGowen's Pass Tavern), (Christmas Eve, 1870). Scene 4. The bird house in the Central Park Zoo. Scene 5. The Central Park Gardens (February, 1871). Act II. Scene 1. The annual Tammany Hall outing (July, 1871). Scene 2. Office of George Jones (owner of "The New York Times"), (later that day). Scene 3. Central Park West (next day at noon). Scene 4. The Stetson Hotel (the same afternoon). Scene 5. The Mall in Central Park (July 4, 1872). Scene 6. The bandstand in the Mall (that evening).

THOUGH FREQUENTLY PITCHED in much too slow a tempo and here and there tediously inclined to plot tautology, the show on the whole amounts to a pleasant evening. Its book, with Central Park as its background and treating of the

Tweed ring's machinations in connection with it back in the 1870's, has an inner juice considerably superior to the more usual book about sailors rabbiting after girls, modern characters dreaming themselves back into another century, and Counts mistaking saucy midinettes for celebrated opera singers. It is true that it is not given to much comedy, but then neither is the book of the otherwise admirable *Show Boat*, with which, however, this *Up In Central Park* does not in any remotest sense compare. Though a major share of Romberg's music once again suggests that he is gifted with an ear of elephant-like virtuosity — one may hum part of a Planquette song from *The Chimes Of Normandy*, part of another from Strauss' *The Gypsy Baron* and much of a third in the form of *Upsadaisy* along with three of his without noticeably disturbing the singers or the orchestra — there are several that fondle the emotions and one or two, while also hardly unfamiliar, that evoke a contentful aural response. And some of the dances staged by Helen Tamiris, notably an ice skating ballet in the Currier and Ives snow, are both novel and attractive. The concluding scene, furthermore, with its band-stand in the Mall etched by the amber Park lights and with its scarlet-coated fiddlers, tooters and drummers banging out the martial *The Big Back Yard* is great showshop stuff and guaranteed to tickle all those of us who still recall the grand old shows in which such brass bands as John Philip Sousa's were wont to parade onto the stage at the finish and send us out of the theatre on a wave of such sound as makes any bell for Adano in comparison a pitiable little tinkle.

That the show conduces to nostalgia, as many have averred, strikes me as an error. I for one can not see just how any pathos of distance is conjured up by the most corrupt gang of swindling politicians that New York ever knew. The mood stimulated is rather one of disgust that such a gang could ever have existed and prospered. But even that is a relief from the bogusly nostalgic shows which seek to induce in us a sentimental tear over the gone yesterdays with storehouse rose arbors, insistent purple lights, and waltzes danced by sopranos and tenors in polka rhythm.

The fact remains, too, that you can not hope to work up any honest audience nostalgia, assuming that that was the producer's intent, with female principals, albeit as talented as those in this show, who lack the kind of looks and personalities that set the eyes and mind to dreaming of fragrant rosemary.

Nevertheless, to repeat, the show over-all has considerable refreshment in it: its settings by Howard Bay have all the nostalgia which the book misses; its music, while often an old and tried friend, is at least not too Tin Pan Alley; and, if humor is largely absent, it is better that it be so than that the book-writers depress us further with such attempts as, for example, "Those parlor curtains made a very nice dress."

Directly after the curtain fell on the opening night, Mr. Todd, the producer, invited the reviewers to what I was told was a very fancy champagne supper dance in the Tavern-On-The-Green. Moreover, in order to spare them any inconvenience with taxicabs, he antecedently provided them with stylish conveyances at their various places of dining to fetch them to the theatre. Just why Mr. Todd, whose show was a sufficiently good and sure-fire one, should have deemed it necessary thus to ingratiate himself with the reviewers, I can not understand. But it remains that in this respect he was not and is not alone. A number of his fellow-producers, themselves also with good shows, have done much the same thing.

Mr. Pemberton, for example, producer of the extremely enjoyable and successful *Harvey*, gave not one party for the critics but two or three, including a gala at the Copacabana which included in turn a beautiful Powers model hostess who saw to it that they were supplied with other beautiful models as table companions. Mr. Rose, whose *The Seven Lively Arts* handsomely adorned his handsome new Ziegfeld Theatre, purveyed vintage Bollinger, Veuve Cliquot, Krug, and Moët and Chandon to the fraternity not only before his first-night curtain went up but in the intermission and after the show. Mr. Lester, producer of the highly prosperous *Song Of Norway*, gave the reviewers a midnight

feast at the Astor, which, I am further informed, ran the gamut from Beluga caviar to Beluga crêpes Suzette and lasted nigh unto dawn. And other producers with similarly successful shows have not only partied the critical gentry to within an inch of their lives but have even seen to it that their jobs have been made doubly easy for them by supplying special Pullmans, properly stocked with Scotch, to allow them previews of their shows in the outlying cities.

The paradox is that the majority of these solicitous producers had and have exhibits which are so meritorious that they can perfectly well stand on their own feet and have no need of ethyl alcohol, tournedos Louis XV, and beautiful models to induce the desired assimilation and hospitable critical mood. Beyond a couple of glasses of entr'acte champagne at *The Seven Lively Arts*, I personally, following the well-known old Indian philosophy, have abstained from all these social activities, since, among other reasons, cocktails and late supper parties and Powers models do not agree with me and since I consider a good show to be a wholly sufficient pleasure and reward in itself.

In the case of poor shows, the situation is, of course, materially different and it might not be such a bad idea if the producers of them took over this party business from their gratuitously over-generous colleagues. Certainly the critics should be given at least a grand ball by the producer of anything like *Good Night Ladies*, and the very least the producer of something like *A Goose For The Gander* could do would be to give them a special train, outfitted with gallons of Martinis, a first-rate chef, and maybe twenty or thirty Conover models, to take them to French Lick to recuperate.

To return to the show and Mr. Romberg, say what you will about him he nevertheless seems to know the trick of concocting the kind of sentimental songs that transport the public, like other such mechanical contrivances as the Subway and trolley cars. For years, in exhibits like *The Student Prince*, *The New Moon*, the Schubert paraphrased *Blossom Time*, etc., he has managed the manufacture of often synthetic melodies, patterned more or less not only after the

work of past composers but on occasion after his own previous popular compositions, which have auspiciously put a wistful gulp in the throats of his customers and set them to dreaming of whatever people with Romberg gulps in their throats wistfully dream of under such circumstances. And in the present show, notably in songs like "Close As Pages In A Book," he turns the trick again.

Pinero's old recommendation that a playwright tell an audience a thing seven times in order that it may safely assimilate it has been taken to heart musically by Mr. Romberg. If, as in the well-known clinical sound experiments that determine which musical note or chord will make a dog howl, Mr. Romberg discovers a note or chord that is successful in evoking a sentimental response from his auditors, he never lets go of it, like the dog tenaciously hanging on to a bone. And not only doesn't he let go of it but he gives it, in composition after composition over the seasons, the Pinero works. The result has been that the public at large year after year has come almost automatically to swallow the à la Newburg bait, much like an undiscriminating fish might swallow a worm smeared with molasses. And Mr. Romberg has become a rich man, able to play pinochle with Rudolf Friml.

ALICE IN ARMS. JANUARY 31, 1945

A comedy, originally known as Star In The Window, by Ladislas Bush-Fekete, Mary Helen Fay and Sidney Sheldon. Produced by Edward Choate and Marie Louise Elkins for 5 performances in the National Theatre.

PROGRAM

MIKE	Johnnie Venn	COLLINS	Tom McElhaney
WILLIS	James O'Neil	1ST PRIVATE	Jerry Vincent
DAISY	Florence Shirley	2ND PRIVATE	Richard Coogan
ALICE	Peggy Conklin	STEVE	Kirk Douglas
HELEN	Judith Abbott	BEEKER	George Ives
FLORENCE	Darthy Hinkley	HENRY	Mickey Stewart
WALTER	Roger Clark	COLONEL BENSON	G. Albert Smith

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Evening. Act II. Scene 1. Morning of the next day. Scene 2. That evening. Act III. Ten o'clock the same evening.

The Scene. Daisy Madison's house in Linwood, Pa.

The Time. October, 1944.

T

HE MANAGEMENT apparently proceeded upon the theory that one poor playwright multiplied by three might produce a good play. The three it selected were (1) Mr. Bush-Fekete, a Central European whose previous local contributions were *The Lady Has A Heart*, which was about as terrifying as they come; a play script that served the Messrs. Hecht and MacArthur for their *Ladies And Gentlemen*, which was little better; and the dramatization of Werfel's *Embezzled Heaven*, a botch; (2) Miss Fay (Mrs. Bush-Fekete) who had collaborated on the aforesaid botch; and (3) Mr. Sheldon, a music show book fixer and collaborator whose principal gifts to the theatre had been a scene incorporated into a revival of *The Merry Widow* wherein the comedian ate nine bananas and a joke in *Jackpot* wherein a fat comedian in a woods scene said that he would like to look like a slender birch and was apprised by another character that he looked like a big ash. The combined efforts of the distinguished trio, doubtless to the shocked

surprise of the hopeful management, amounted only to still another of the returned soldier plays, this one a knock-kneed paraphrase of *Dear Ruth* and without the slightest infection of merit.

The triumph of the amalgamated imaginations of the trio consisted in converting the usual returned soldier into a WAC. Beyond that, their fancy seemed to be unable to reach farther than the customary triangle involving the girl, the civilian who hopes to marry her, and the soldier who appears in due course from overseas and ends up with her. The other characters were the habitual fluttery mother given to tasty cooking, the small brat of a brother who collects money from all and sundry, the lazy old cadging uncle, the country postman who knows what is on all the postcards and in all the letters, the comic neighborhood fat boy (here named Henry Ford and given to a constant reiteration of "But no relation"), the giggling neighbor girls, and the stencil rest.

The humor included, among similar riches, the joke about ordering a dish from a French menu and learning that it was the name of the restaurant owner, and the line, upon being handed a present, "It's beautiful, but what is it?" And the sentiment achieved its highest development in the routine mush about Paris: "There's something about Paris — it's hard to say just what it is — that's unlike any other city in the world. But Paris isn't meant for one; it's meant for two. It does something to you, to them. It doesn't matter if there are no lights, no heat, no elevator service; there's something in the air that gets you. Ah, Paris, dear beautiful, beautiful Paris!"

The exhibit marked the twenty-seventh of the season inhabited by military uniforms.

THE OVERTONS. FEBRUARY 6, 1945

A comedy by Vincent Lawrence. Produced by Paul Czinner for a beyond the season forced run in, initially, the Booth Theatre.

PROGRAM

CORA OVERTON	Arlene Francis	TOMMY	Donald Kohler
JULIA	Mary Lawrence	MINOT	Charles Lang
JUDITH BANCROFT	Glenda Farrell	JAMES LAWSON	Walter N. Greaza
JACK OVERTON	Jack Whiting		

SYNOPSIS: The Overtons' home near New York. Act I. Living-room. Late summer afternoon. Act II. Same. After dinner. (Curtain is lowered to denote the passing of half an hour.) Act III. Bedroom. A few minutes later.

AT HIS BEST, in such plays of two decades or so ago as *Sour Grapes*, *Among The Married*, *Spring Fever*, *A Distant Drum*, and *Two Married Men*, Vincent Lawrence indicated that no comedy writer for our theatre has had a shrewder understanding of the peculiar quirks in the amorous psyches of the male and female of the species. S. N. Behrman, who enjoys a much higher dramaturgical skill and a greater literary grace, was and is to be listed as his closest contender in this respect, but some distance nevertheless has separated them. Behrman every now and then has viewed his men and women through the peach-colored spectacles of a Pinero, but not so Lawrence. That is, to emphasize again, when he has been in top trim.

Pinero was secretly more or less in wayward love with many of his women characters, and hence near-sighted in his contemplation of them. Only in some such rare case as his *A Wife Without A Smile* did he approach one of them fairly platonically. Behrman is similarly, if not exactly in love with his leading female characters, at least somewhat infatuated with them. But Lawrence, while he undoubtedly likes his women, is far from wearing his heart on his

playwriting sleeve and appraises them pretty coolly for what inside them they really are.

Having spent the greater part of his life since his meritorious beginnings in the Hollywood factories, a considerable portion of his earlier sagacity has deserted him. One needed only to observe his men and women in *Washington Heights*, which he wrote while out there and which was produced in New York during a very brief holiday trip East some fourteen years ago, to appreciate the bacilli that even so soon began to go to work on him. But though he is far from being the man he was before Hollywood took its toll of him, it is gratifying to learn that, for all his decline, at least some traces of his old seeing-eye still obstinately inhere in him. A look at *The Overtons* sufficiently proves it, though the play itself otherwise has all kinds of things wrong with it and though even what is not wrong with it was made to seem so by poor casting, bad acting, and Elisabeth Bergner's even worse stage direction. The result of these last named botcheries caused the less discerning to lose sight of the author's periodic virtues and outright to condemn the play in its entirety.

Lawrence has often in the past suffered from this critical confusion of misguided stage presentation with the script. And his plays themselves have here and there in part, it must be granted, helped to contribute to their condemnation as a whole. But it remains that, whatever their freely admitted deficiencies, they offer moments and intermittent scenes which for sharp penetration of the sexual and amorous natures of human fowl are uncommon to our native playwriting.

The Overtons, with its feeble first act, mild second and thoroughly ingenious third, though lacking in other respects is not lacking in such moments and scenes which dig hintfully into the esoteric psychology of its characters. Its failure at the hands of most of the reviewers and at the money-till is indeed as much due to these truthful moments and scenes as to its more general obvious weaknesses. For if there is one way to fail in our American theatre it is to deal with uncompromising honesty with men and women

beset by the idiosyncrasies of sexual passion and the spidery business called love. The best and most truthful comedies on the subject, like Brieux's *The Incubus*, have invariably failed, as have the best of the somewhat more serious plays, like Porto-Riche's *L'Amoureuse*. (In the case of the two examples named, both have collapsed not only upon their original local productions but upon their revivals.) And in the still more serious approach to the subject, such eminent dramatists as Strindberg, Björnson, Wedekind, *et al.*, have never been acceptable to the public at large.

To achieve eulogy and money, a writer of sex comedy, which is the immediate topic, must make his characters believe not what they honestly by their very natures believe but rather what an audience would believe in their places. Lawrence does not thus condescend to an audience's prejudices, or at least he does not condescend sufficiently, and his reward, over the years, has been preordained failure.

As in most of his plays, *The Overtons* lays hold of a familiar plot scheme and seeks to make it fresh by viewing it through unconventional eyes. In this instance the story is simply the oft-told one of the loving married couple torn asunder by suspicion of faithlessness and eventually re-united. Worse for originality in any such direction, its basic fabric sometimes suggests a mosaic of episodes from a variety of recognizable plays, among them *Bought And Paid For*, *The Constant Wife*, and *Private Lives*. Yet in detail it frequently achieves the touches of freshness implicit in the author's before-noted close observation and assessment: the wholly innocent and negligible little remarks and acts on the part of a man that drive a woman, however much she loves him, to distraction; the peculiar remaining pull of a sex attraction of which a man thinks he has tired and is done with; the contentful physical weariness that overcomes a man when after too long preparation and too deferred triumph he has subjugated a woman's amatory reluctance; the shoe that remains stubbornly and embarrassingly irremovable at the aforesaid triumphant moment; etc., etc.

While it is true that even a dozen swallows do not make a summer or a dozen or more such little things a play, it

seems a pity that criticism has not liberally taken sufficient cognizance of them and more greatly encouraged their author toward the fulfilment of his higher intentions, and has driven him back once again, downcast and discouraged, to Hollywood.

Miss Bergner's direction was predicated on the popular European theory that American audiences will fall asleep save a stage be directed in the tempo of an express train run amuck. The actors were accordingly instructed into so much footwork and so many bouncings up and down on couches and chairs, dashings up and down stairs and scampering exits that the exhibit resembled less a play on a February theatre stage than the Coney Island Subway station on the Fourth of July. As for the acting performances themselves, Miss Francis in the role of the wife offered a succession of imitations of Lynn Fontanne, Gertrude Lawrence and several other actresses, seemingly omitting only one of Cissie Loftus; Mr. Whiting as the husband conducted himself after the musical comedy formula with which he has had so long an experience; Mr. Greaza as the suspicious lover again, as in *The Visitor*, sniffingly prowled about the stage as if shadowed by the crate of puissant cheese; and the personable Miss Farrell for the greater part of the evening poutingly threw her effervescent corpus upon all the chairs, divans and window-seats in sight, on frequent occasion in such cunning wise that the splendors of her hinter contours would not be lost to the audience.

HOPE FOR THE BEST. FEBRUARY 7, 1945

A comedy by William McCleery. Produced by Jean Dalrymple and Marc Connally for 117 forced performances in, initially, the Fulton Theatre.

PROGRAM

HOWARD HILTON	Edmond Ryan	Sgt. JOE JORDAN	Paul Potter
MRS. BASSETT	Doro Merande	LUCILLE DALY	Jane Wyatt
MARGARET HICKS HARWOOD		MICHAEL JORDAN	Franchot Tone
	Joan Wetmore		
PROFESSOR WECHSLER			
	Leo Bulgakov		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A Saturday afternoon in spring. Act II. That evening. Act III. The next morning.

All of the action of the play takes place in the living-room of Michael's house in Connecticut.

MINUS ANYTHING resembling real wit, humor, or character drawing — or, for that matter, a sense of dramatic writing — the play gets nowhere, and quickly. The first curtain is not up long before one can ascertain not only its ending, but its finish. After all, if you hope to concoct an interesting play about a newspaper columnist with great potential gifts as a sociological and political expert you can not very safely present him as a cross between the Harold Lloyd of the early movie slapstick comedies and an oaf who hopes to accomplish anything with a pair of women constantly hanging over his typewriter and alternately kissing him on the ear and cheek. And you can hardly persuade an audience to accept the character as worth a second important thought by directing the actor playing him, as Marc Connally did, to comport himself like Baby Snooks, even though he wear tweeds and smoke a pipe.

Mr. McCleery's further attempt to fascinate his auditors with the doctrine of liberalism is couched in such debutante terms, involving gadgets such as blocks of wood that

tumble cardwise into a heap by way of illustrating the necessity of the common man's share in world economy and a globe of the world augurously containing a lot of smaller globes representing countries, states and communities, that one anticipates Ed Wynn to come on and preside over the stage. The net effect of Mr. McCleery's hero's endeavors in the direction of liberalism, accordingly, is any half-way intelligent auditor's immediate complete sympathy with his hypothetically odious character who offers herself as a snobbish reactionary.

The general writing is no less unfortunate. A scene, for example, in which the young heroine stands close to the footlight trough, faces the audience, and for what seems at least twenty minutes indulges in an excited monologue, with gestures, about her father's remarkable baseball pitching achievements, suggests nothing so much as one of the hereinbefore noted old scenes in which the heroine, similarly adjusting herself to the footlights, used ebulliently to describe an imaginary horse race, to the copious throwing of peanuts at the poor girl from the gallery. Nor is that the worst. The fatuous columnist hero, whenever he loses confidence in himself, which properly and finally should have been before ever the first curtain rose, pulls out a map of his home state, Indiana, and visualizes upon it the smiling face of his deceased mother. His conversation, when he is not righteously concerned with correcting the grammatical errors of other persons present or spouting his patent medicine cure-alls for the world's ills, consists in perfectly solemn allusions to the muses that guide his literary efforts. The heroine in love with this mastermind tenderly expresses her philosophy respecting him thus: "I always like to see anything done superhumanly well by a modest little guy, so long as he is very human in all other ways." The general attempts at humor reach their pinnacle in the hero's observation that he once knew a fellow who always wanted to meet a girl who already had a fur coat and had her appendix out. And he eventually sums up his momentous recipe for the betterment of the world in the declaration that every citizen should bear the responsibility for it and

should go about his community ringing the doorbells of others to see to it that they are not remiss in sharing that responsibility.

Mr. Connelly's stage direction periodically had Fran-chot Tone in the role of the columnist perform much like Stan Laurel, of the Laurel and Hardy team; caused the attractive and normally impressive Jane Wyatt to embarrass herself out of any ease of movement; allowed Leo Bulgakov in the role of the inventor of the columnist's gadgets so to mutter his lines that the audience could not make anything of them; and permitted Joan Wetmore in the part of the American reactionary to constitute herself a poker stirring up the cold embers of such a Manhattan-British accent as he apparently believed indicated a very high-toned social station.

ONE-MAN SHOW. FEBRUARY 8, 1945

A play by Ruth Goodman and Augustus Goetz. Produced by Jed Harris for 36 performances in the Ethel Barrymore Theatre.

PROGRAM

LUCIAN GARDNER	Frank Conroy	EMORY JELLIFFE	James Rennie
A WOMAN	Elizabeth Brew	BLANCHE	Kasia Orzazeuski
TOM	Mitchell Harris	FRANCIS KEARNY	John Archer
JAMES DOCKEREL	Hugh Franklin		
RACINE GARDNER			

Constance Cummings

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Late afternoon. Act II. After dinner. A week later. Act III. The next morning.

Scene is the Gardner Gallery, New York City.

Time. Spring.

THE PLAY is basically a variant of the silver chord theme with a father in the place of the mother. It treats of what the Freudians describe as a father-daughter fixation, which impels the girl to offer her favors, whether merely flirtatious or more anatomical, to potential buyers of the former's art gallery wares that she may gratify his every wish, and which eventually impels the father in turn to something that seems very closely to approach incest. In their attempt at subtlety in this sexual direction the novice authors have fallen into such studied confusion that some of the earlier portions of their play lose meaning and suggest that it might have been to their dramaturgical advantage had they tutored themselves in such modern playwrights with a similar exotic theme as, for example, Lenormand. In the same way, it would have been better for them had they not so obviously tutored themselves in the problem plays of the Pinero school of the 1890's. It is difficult in this connection not to think at times of Sir Arthur's Iris, Maldonado and Trenwith in the cases of their paraphrases respectively named Racine, Jelliffe, and Kearny.

Several scenes are intelligently handled and nicely phrased, but the others more frequently are invalidated in the mind of the audience by a heavy calculation, taking among other things such transparent dramatic forms as allowing the characters not only to anticipate one another's thoughts but to predetermine what they are about to say. This is often supposed by beginning playwrights to contribute valuably to dramatic economy and quickly to further the action. What it just as often does is to provide any experienced audience contemplating the pseudo-clairvoyant characters with the feeling that it could have foretold the thoughts and speech of the lot of them at least twenty-five years before.

The authors, furthermore, are given to miscellaneous stage pauses, in this instance considerably extended by Jed Harris' direction, which are designed to give the impression that the actors are deep in perplexed thought. This in turn provides the audience with a thought of its own, albeit not so deep and perplexed. To wit, that the pauses are arbitrary on the authors' part and are inserted at such intervals as the latter are baffled in the writing of materials relevant to the actors' immediate articulative purposes. These pauses, even in the instance of much more able playwrights, often lead to disaster, since it is notorious that most actors, even against the polite persuasions of their directors, or perhaps with the latter's despairful concurrence, are disposed under the circumstances to privilege themselves a Roman holiday of such anatomical *tours de force* and such face-makings as would frighten the virtuosity of even an Oscar-endorsed motion picture performer.

Some of the authors' humor is sufficiently cultivated, but more is of an impaired nature that imposes upon the dialogue such byplay as an ironic observation, following a high price set upon a painting, that the artist must be dead; the request by a man with a substantial highball in his hand that his host add more whiskey to it "to lighten it"; the admiration of a painting that happens to have been hung upside down; the query, following a man's rapt description

of the women in South America, if there are not any males among the inhabitants; and a paraphrase of the idea that the surest way to guarantee rain is to carry an umbrella.

In the way of character drawing, the authors are most successful in the instance of the father. The daughter, energetically fashioned as a sympathetic character, emerges, for all their efforts to suggest her otherwise, as half nincompoop, half—in the vulgar expression—pushover, and with a one-finger equipment assiduously addressing itself to the emotional keyboard. The rich, elderly lawyer who hopes to persuade her to be his mistress through favors to her father is directly out of the popular drama of fifty years ago, confected in England by the Pinero-Jones school and later on in America by the Broadhurst-Walter group. The young artist who wishes to marry the daughter is the stereotyped young stage artist down to the rumpled trousers and worn tan raincoat. And the young hero who finally wins her from her father's sinister wing is essentially the familiar "clean" young fellow from the wide, open spaces.

The acting in the cases of Frank Conroy, as the father, and John Archer, as the open-spacer, was satisfactory, but in the cases of several of the others, notably Miss Cummings, far from that. While moderately convincing in her lighter moments, save for the omnipresent belief that amiability is most effectively to be expressed by a firmly tethered smile, the latter's performance in the serious passages much too regularly suggested that she had rehearsed her role with a stock company Scarpia.

Mr. Harris' direction varied from the first-rate in certain details (his handling of the adjoining room dinner table with the identity of the guest hidden by an only partly opened door was excellent theatre) to the overly pretentious in the matter of the stage in general. He seemed to have subscribed to the Herman Shumlin directorial theory that a slow and ponderous tempo heightens the air of a play's importance. What it more commonly does is rather to show up the play's tenuousness. His insistence upon actors seated down stage and facing the audience con-

tributed further to artificiality. And his conversion of the daughter role into a duet played by Julia Sanderson and Lady Macbeth, presuming that he and not the actress in it was responsible, was, in view of his past sagacity, an eye-brow lever.

THE STRANGER. FEBRUARY 12, 1945

A melodrama by Leslie Reade. Produced by Shepard Traube for 16 performances in the Playhouse.

PROGRAM

NAPOLEON MICKALIEFF

Engene Sigaloff

JEAN PRUNIER

Alfred Hesse

BILL HUMPHREYS

Kim Spalding

POLICE CONSTABLE HOOD

Stanley Bell

CHRISTINA THOMSON

Perry Wilson

LIZ

Stella Todd

MRS. GREGORY

Eva Leonard-Boyne

MAGGIE MACANDREWS

Wendy Atkin

DAVID MENDELSON

Eduard Franz

A GENTLEMAN *Morton L. Stevens*

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *An autumn night.* Act II. *Night, about a week later.* Act III. Scene 1. *Saturday night, the following week.* Scene 2. *Next morning.*

The entire action takes place in the meeting room of the International Workmen's Educational Club in London. The time is 1888.

T

HIS IS AN EVEN POORER EXCURSION INTO THE FAMILIAR Jack-the-Ripper theme than *Hand In Glove* (*q.v.*). Not content with writing a simple and possibly effective melodrama, the author has followed the later day grim determination of playwrights to lend their exhibits an air of greater importance than any really buoyant melodrama should properly possess. One does not demand that melodrama necessarily include a lot of gunfire, or pugilism on high cliffs, or the East River docks at midnight, or even a saw-mill or horse race. But one has the right to ask that it concern itself principally with affording one a few spinal vibrations, and they are hardly forthcoming when, as in this case, the playwright takes the attention from what should be the business in hand with belated William Archer quotations of Bernard Shaw, disquisitions on slum conditions, and justifications of economic revolutions, along with some fancy psychology, sociological philosophy, and other such matters more relevant to an entirely different species of drama.

Mr. Reade, an Englishman, according to the program holds a degree from Oxford and, thus probably considering simple, unaffected melodrama beneath his intellectual status, has sought further to minimize his peccadillo by hanging a picture of Karl Marx on its wall, merchanting psychopathic apologies for his villain, and indulging in such facetiae about his fellow Britons, Russian opera singers, and French morals as even George Kaufman would hesitate to incorporate into *The Late George Apley*. He additionally considers himself so superior to his audience, and the latter such an utter simpleton, that he believes it subsequently will possibly believe that a character whom he has laboriously built up as a sympathetic figure may, for all the evidence he piles up against him, turn out to be guilty of the crime with which the play concerns itself. He condescends yet more greatly to the audience by making this figure a persecuted Jew, and if there is another playwright who doesn't know that a present-day audience in turn knows that no Jew shown on the stage is ever finally disclosed to be other than an admirable character, and not even a tenth cousin to Jack-the-Ripper, he has not been heard from in some time. Mr. Reade, for all his Oxford training, doubtless in this connection had his eye on the popular box-office quite as hopefully as such past American night-school alumni as Harry James Smith, Aaron Hoffman, Anne Nichols, *et al.*

Even aside from these considerations, Mr. Reade fails to reveal himself as a competent hand at melodrama. His dialogue descends to the outworn "Why should I be telling you all this?" business; his idea of shock reposes in such innocent old Guignolisms as the murderer's impudent challenge to the police that he will cut off the ears of his next victim and send them along as a present and as a police officer's shout to an assistant off stage, upon peering out of the window at the body of a slashed victim, "Mind you 'er 'ead don't drop off!"; and his chief reliance upon suspense is vested in an old crone fortune-teller who shrinks from the suspected party as one possessed of the evil eye and as a

criminal of most sinister hue, thus fooling the audience as to his guilt not in the slightest.

The Jack-the-Ripper theme, in short, has by now been done to death by inept playwrights. Some years ago Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes contrived still to entertain audiences with Jack's idiosyncrasies in *The Lodger*, but since then his carving virtuosity has become steadily less fascinating in the hands of less imaginative writers, and the theatre seems to be willing to relegate him permanently to the left-wing Hall of Fame.

Boris Aronson's fearsome set was sorely disappointed by what was played inside it.

In short, the fifty-eighth failure out of sixty-five attempts.

SIGNATURE! FEBRUARY 14, 1945

A melodrama by Elizabeth McFadden, based on a short story, Nabeth's Vineyard, by Melville Davisson Post. Produced by Richard Skinner and Dorothy Willard for 2 performances in the Forrest Theatre.

PROGRAM

JUDGE SIMON KILRAIL

Frederic Tozere

ZEKE

Morris McKenney

CHARLES BORSE

Lawrence Fletcher

THADEUS BRAXTON

Charles Francis

JOHN CARTWRIGHT

Donald Murphy

RANDOLPH

Lyster Chambers

ABNER DAVISSON

Judson Laire

NORA DAVISSON

Marjorie Lord

LANCE MOOR

Charles Keane

1ST GUARD

William Forester

WILLIAM TAYLOR

Bob Stevenson

FENDLER

Charles S. Dubin

ALICE STEUART

Anne Jackson

2ND GUARD

Lew Herbert

NATHANIEL MADISON

George Lessey

AUNT SOPHIE GIDE

Nell Harrison

DR. MARTIN STORM

John McKee

HON. THOMAS FARGON

Gregory Robins

DICCON

Page Spencer

MORREY

Bruce Halsey

REV. ROCKFORD

Peter Pann

HENRY

Coby Neal

ARNOLD

Harry Kadison

DAYTON

Charles Kuhn

REV. ADAM RIDER

Cyrus Staehle

ALKIRI

Frederic Faber

DONOVAN

Edwin Cushman

ELNATHAN STONE

Glenn Regent

WARD

William McMillen

SYNOPSIS: Act I. An evening in August, about 10.00 p.m. Act II. Sunset, one week later. Act III. Morning, two weeks later. The opening day at September term of the Circuit Court.

The play takes place in a conference room in the courthouse of a hill town of Virginia, about 1856.

MELODRAMA which discloses the identity of the criminal very early in the proceedings and concerns itself thereafter with fastening the guilt upon him calls for a much shrewder artificer than Miss McFadden. Ingenious invention and action seem to evade her talents and, as if appreciating her weakness in sustaining an air of ominous suspense, she takes refuge in such a repertoire of off-stage sounds, designed to

supply of Hollywood horror films. Baying hounds, death-buzzing katydids, stealthy feet, branches that beat against the walls of the house, rising mob noises, howling winds, glass panes smashed by the storm, clanking door chains, and a load of other such villainous *hors d'œuvres* are thus hopefully relied upon to play an obbligato to a mystery that is approximately as mysterious as *Mother Carey's Chickens* and to a thriller that does not thrill. Under the circumstances, it would probably have been more fortunate all around had Miss McFadden permitted her audience to absorb her play from backstage.

Melville Davisson Post, whose story serves as the foundation of the melodrama, in his day concocted some curiously piquant tales, notably in the volumes called *The Strange Schemes Of Randolph Mason* and *The Man Of Last Resort*, both of which deal with the possibility of committing various crimes in the different states of the Union safe, under the peculiar laws of the states, from conviction. The story which Miss McFadden has made use of is of another sort, to wit, the guilty judge who finds himself presiding over the trial of the accused, and in one paraphrase or another has for many years been familiar. To fashion a holding melodrama from it in this later day would not be easy, since even were the preliminaries made interesting, which in this case they are not, the last and what should be the punching act must necessarily resolve itself, aside from the jurist's conventional climactic gasps and totters, into more or less actionless talk, and since the dénouement is theatrically predetermined. Like other contemporary writers of melodrama, Miss McFadden has hoped to infuse her play, and particularly this final act, with some vitality by lugging in what passes for sociological thought, but all her declamations on "the latent power of the crowd for constructive good," "the indomitable will of the people for justice," and "the ordinary democratic citizen's responsibility for the acts of his public servants" succeed in doing nothing other than to emphasize her desperation in the face of sagging drama.

While, generally, the presumably frightening noises are

going on off-stage, the stage itself is occupied by so many outworn devices of melodrama — secret drawers, self-opening creaky doors, the missing papers, etc. — that the noises refractorily lend them an air of travesty, much as might the portentous drum beats of *The Emperor Jones* were Jones to be acted by Hamtree Harrington. And albeit the noises were for the most part well-handled, those supposed specifically to represent the whining of the trees in the night wind sounded so much like something by Rudolf Friml that, when they intermittently went into operation, the audience was to be pardoned for thinking that the judge might at any moment burst into song.

Roy Hargrave's direction was otherwise better than the materials deserved; the acting company was fair enough; and Stewart Chaney's set, ably lighted by Hargrave, here once again offered all the foreboding that the play neglected to realize.

The fifty-ninth failure in sixty-six tries.

AND BE MY LOVE. FEBRUARY 21, 1945

A comedy by Edward Caulfield. Produced by Arthur J. Beckhard in association with Victor Hugo-Vidal for 14 performances in the National Theatre.

PROGRAM

SARAH FENTON	Lotus Robb	ALLEN	Charles Colby
HENRY	Walter Hampden	MR. FILLMORE	Jed Prouty
MARTHA WEBSTER	Esther Dale	ADA BENNETT	Violet Heming
MRS. SPENCE	Edmonia Nolley	LIZZIE	Viola Dean
MR. SPENCE	Sydney Grant	No. 2527	Graham Velsey
PHYLLIS	Ruth Homond		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A late morning in August. Act II. Morning. One week later. Act III. Afternoon. Five days later.

The action takes place in the sitting-room of Sarah Fenton's house in Riverhead.

THE PLAY WAS a product of one of the summer theatres and like so many other exhibits in the summer theatres doubtless required the remission of judgment induced by several hundred assiduous mosquitoes and ten or twelve Coca-Colas for its enjoyment, if any. In wintertime New York it required a suspension of judgment induced by enough Old-fashioneds to make one think one was seeing *Harvey* to generate any favorable reaction to it.

Treating of an elderly actor posing as a naturalist and of his amorous adventures with a middle-aged widow whom he has encountered in a matrimonial bureau, the comedy in essence is a distant cousin to such as E. S. Willard and Sol Smith Russell used to appear in. Those similarly involved an elderly fellow, sometimes a professor given to the study of butterflies, sometimes a crusty but lovable widower whose beautiful young ward had come to live with him (and in both cases absent-minded), who didn't realize that the heroine loved him until it was time for the oldsters in the audience to go back home again and fight with their

wives. But, though the plays were very innocent and frequently even childish, they were now and again written with some skill and humor and feeling, and they provided pleasant entertainment in their equally innocent and even childish theatrical day.

Mr. Caulfield is undoubtedly a worthy man in other respects, but he has none of the qualities that went to make such comedies acceptable. Aside from one or two fair gags, his specimen travels a corduroy dialogue road and its characters are for the most part descendants of deceased theatrical characters rather than persons freshly out of life. His work, in short, gives the impression not of a comedy that had to be written out of its author's undeniable, eager, and honest impulse but merely out of its author's arbitrary determination to write a play, come hell or high water.

Too many writers these days seem to fashion plays for that and no other reason. They are apparently impelled to dramatic composition not through anything they have experienced which has made a deep impression upon them, not through anything they have observed which has affected them, but simply because the urge to try their hands at playwriting is irresistible. This accounts not only for the surplusage of dramatized stories and novels which absolve the writers from any such personal experience or personal observation, but also for the poverty of the plays which they write independently. Even artificial comedy calls for experience and observation, as the plays of Sheridan, Wilde and Co. fully attest. And certainly comedy that purports to be realistic calls for the qualities at the top of its voice.

Mr. Caulfield further complicates his difficulties in having laid hold of a love story whose solution at the altar was, under its own theatrical terms, both automatic and entirely obvious. His efforts to defer that solution, which in other hands might have been made perfectly acceptable through witty treatment, take rather the stereotyped and dull form of mechanical outside interference on the part of equally stereotyped puppets, the net effect being of a heavy freight train bound for nearby Trenton, New Jersey, which finds itself far in advance of its running schedule and, by way of

killing time, stops at Newark, Passaic, Rahway, Paterson, Elizabeth, New Brunswick and Princeton Junction to take aboard an assortment of payless wayfarers.

It is, in short, nothing much against the play that, as the usual complaint goes, one can see its ending from the start. What is against it is that, as intimated, the author does nothing in the way of interrupting the vision with compensatory humors, lively reflections, amusing character traits, or any other such alleviating *pourboires*. While the train of his plot is slowly puffing and pulling its way toward its matrimonial destination, he fails to lift the window curtains, or to sell magazines, or to peddle milk chocolate and ice-cream cones, or to have the porter wipe off one's shoes at intervals, or to do much of anything else to break the monotony.

A play whose ending is clearly in sight shortly after its beginning may, contrary to popular opinion, often be a wholly satisfactory play, provided its author be a sufficiently gifted fellow. In the case of mystery plays, things are different; but in the matter of other species of drama it is less the destination that counts than the nature of the journey. It is as easy to foretell the ending of Maugham's excellent comedy, *The Circle*, as it is to foretell that of this hopeless one of Caulfield's. It is Maugham's nimble mind and uncommon skill that spell the difference.

All kinds of good comedies, while lacking in surprise in connection with their conclusions, make up for the lack in surprises of one sort or another *en route*: shrewd turns of phrase, odd facets of character, apt transitory business, etc. It would be a blind man who could not foresee the endings of a long line of such comedies as Bahr, Capus, Caillavet, Flers, and even the great Shaw himself have periodically written. But it would be a deaf one indeed who did not appreciate the verbal picnic provided by the authors in the intermediate distance.

Even a comedy whose final resolution is readily discernible and whose dialogue leading up to it is not remarkable for any inspiring wit or humor may occasionally manage to get by on the score of its acting or by virtue of favorite

personalities in its cast. A number of comedies, feeble in themselves, have thus been successful with audiences in France when a Guitry or Boucher has appeared in them, in England when a Hawtrey or Du Maurier or Hicks has purveyed them, and in this country when a Drew or Ditrichstein or Lunt has invested them with his presence. Marie Tempest, Mrs. Fiske, Ethel Barrymore, Ina Claire and other actresses have similarly at times lent profitable bounce to essentially bounceless comedies. But a tepid comedy minus such acting or such personal vitamins has an almost impossible row to hoe, and *And Be My Love* found itself in that furrow.

Mr. Hampden is a respected member of the theatrical community, but not only is he hardly in the popular category of pin-up actors; he is hardly one whose forte is comedy. There is by nature an unbending quality in him which, when he essays comedy, gives his stoop to conquer the aspect of Richelieu recovering the dropped handkerchief of Elwood P. Dowd's sister. The ease and lightness and brio vital to the acting of comedy are simply not in him, and what results from his performance is an audience's feeling that the Servant In The House has in a seizure of amnesia wandered into the wrong household. Miss Robb, likewise, does not enjoy the comedy gift, and between the two of them Mr. Caulfield's already crippled play missed the crutches that might conceivably, remotely conceivably, have kept it from falling on its face.

CALICO WEDDING. MARCH 7, 1945

A comedy by Sheridan Gibney. Produced by Lester Meyer and Richard Myers for 5 performances in the National Theatre.

PROGRAM

CAPT. GEORGE GAYLORD	William Post	BETTY MARLOWE	Patricia White
LIEUT. JENSEN	Roderick Winchell	PEG HALL	Barbara Joyce
NORA	Eva Condon	ALMA BIDDLE	Joy Geffen
MARY GAYLORD	Grete Mosheim	HENDRIK VAN DELDEN	
HERBERT ABERCROMBIE	Forrest Orr		Jerome P. Thor
MRS. ABERCROMBIE	Mary Sargent	"CAF" WILSON	Henry Richards
FREDERICK BOYNTON	Louis Jean Heydt	LOTUS WILDER	Jane Hoffman
		ALAN PACKARD	Vincent Gardner
		BOB WILLARD	John Kane

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. A radio listening post. Alaska. Spring, 1944. Scene 2. Bedroom of the Gaylords' apartment, New York City, spring, 1937. Scene 3. The living-room. The following morning. Act II. The living-room. Late that evening. Act III. The living-room. The next morning.

T

HE PLAY WAS first produced by one of the summer theatre stock companies ten years ago. In an effort to bring it up to date, the author has incorporated a prologue laid in an Army listening post in Alaska, which haplessly has nothing to do with it. But, even if it had a great deal to do with it, it would hardly suffice to bring up to date any play dealing with such antiquated materials as the wife who thinks her husband is neglecting her for his business and who sets out to make him jealous by way of bringing him to book. Add to this basic plot such venerable adornments as the bedroom scene with the husband going to sleep at the wife's most ardent moment, the subsequent scene in which the dejected wife becomes deliriously inebriated upon downing two ounces of alcohol, the scene in which she then makes love to a bashful young man who has become effulgently intoxicated immediately upon imbibing one ounce,

and several other such dramatic souvenirs, and any attempt to lend an air of contemporaneity to the proceedings would have to include no mere Alaska listening post but at least a scene showing the Army invading Tokyo, a *Frankie And Johnny* ballet, and maybe several speeches by Joe Ball, with a big Elsa Maxwell party afterward in the Tavern-On-The-Green.

Under the impression that he had given the necessary fresh life to the comatose materials by allowing the husband to remain uncertain as to just how far his wife had gone with the young man, the Hollywood author apparently had not been informed that, far from being fresh, that idea had served Henry Arthur Jones all of fifty-one years ago in *The Case Of Rebellious Susan*. Under the further impression that he would be esteemed as a man of witty parts, he indulged himself in such humors as the discomfort of a husband's arm slept on by a wife, which apparently nobody had cautioned him was long familiar to readers of Shaw's preface to *Back To Methuselah*, published all of twenty-four years ago. And under the final impression that the idea of a woman so bewildered that she could not know for certain whether she had indulged the night before in sexual intercourse was both novel and extremely piquant (if not idiotic), he apparently missed the advice that the notion had served the play called *The Conquerors* all of a half century ago.

The theory, still indulged in by many playwrights like Mr. Gibney, that jealousy serves invariably as an effective catalyst is the mark of their immaturity. Jealousy just as often turns eventually into irritation toward the person who originates it, and induces a feeling much more closely identified with profound boredom than with amatory stimulation.

In the role of the wife, the Berlin refugee, Grete Mosheim, described in the program by the Celtic Richard Maney as having been one of the more popular players in "the famous Deutsch Theatre," acted for the entire evening in the manner of an Elisabeth Bergner giving an imitation of Billie Burke before the age of puberty.

SIMON'S WIFE. MARCH 7, 1945

A Lenten play by Francis D. Alwaise. Produced by the Blackfriars' Guild for 15 performances in the Blackfriars' Guild Theatre.

PROGRAM

LEAH	Ruth Fischer	JUDAS	Joseph Boley
RACHEL	Helen Purcell	BENJAMIN	David Knight
JOSEPH	James Kearny	A BEGGAR	Robert Hawkins
SIMON	W. Hussung	A PHYSICIAN	Joseph F. Fox
ANDREW	Wilson Brooks	JOHN	Frank P. Soden
MARTHA	Fran Lee		

SYNOPSIS: The action takes place in Palestine in A.D. 28-30. Act I. Scene 1. Simon's house at Capharnaum in Galilee — late afternoon. Scene 2. The same — some weeks later. Act II. The same — one week later. Act III. A rented lodging in Jerusalem — afternoon of the first Good Friday.

T

HE STORY of the play is of the forsaking of his wife Leah by Simon called Peter that he may join the Nazarene as leader of the Apostles, of Leah's bitterness and doubts even in the face of the Nazarene's miraculous cure of her mother, of Simon's loss of loyalty at Gethsemane, of Leah's gradual acquisition of belief, and, finally, of her restoration of faith to Simon and his going forth into the world to preach the Gospel. The author, a Dominican priest, is a beginner in playwriting and his effort fully betrays the fact. Instead of dramatizing his story, he merely talks it, and the whole takes on the color of a not particularly interesting lecture, without even changing stereopticon slides to lend it a bit of movement.

A Blackfriars' program note observed, "In the Lenten season, the organization is interested in providing dramatic fare for those who generally put aside their theatregoing, and in trying out a script for parochial groups who are looking for a new vehicle." The phrase "dramatic fare" was ill-chosen.

GARDEN OF TIME. MARCH 7, 1945

A play by Owen Dodson. Produced by the American Negro Theatre for 30 performances in the West 135th Street Library Theatre.

PROGRAM

MEDEA	{	Sadie Brown	{	JASON	{	Dean Newman
MIRANDA				JOHN		
FIRST WOMAN	{	Joan Smith	{	BELES	{	William Greaves
SECOND WOMAN		Edith Whitman		BLUES BOY		
THIRD WOMAN	{	Doris Black	{	AESON	{	Lawrence Pepper
AETES		Austin Briggs-Hall		MAMA LEUA		Elsie Benjamin
ABSYRTUS (MEDEA'S BROTHER)		Gordon Heath		LITTLE RANDY		Melba Hawkins

The action is laid in ancient Greece and in a Georgia, U. S. A., cemetery at the turn of the nineteenth century.

THE AUTHOR, quondam head of the drama department at Hampton Institute, has here undertaken something. "I believe," he stated in the public prints, "that the modern drama is too stingy. We don't use it for all it's worth. *Garden Of Time* is told in terms of the fable of the Golden Fleece instead of hard, realistic terms. It uses music and song and dance and poetry. It begins in ancient times in Colchis off the coast of Asia Minor and ends in a graveyard in Georgia, U. S. A., at the end of the nineteenth century. It's the story of one country, Greece, the ruling country of the world, going to a smaller country, Colchis, whose people are a dark people and trying to take its emblems. Jason, the Greek, captures the Golden Fleece, aided by Medea, priestess of Colchis, who has fallen in love with him. They flee to Greece, killing Medea's brother in their flight. Two children are born to them, but eventually Jason deserts Medea. 'You're dark,' he tells her, 'I can't stand you.' Actually he is spurred on by the chance of marriage with Creusa and its promise of new wealth and possessions."

Here, continued the author, "the play switches to the end

of the last century, with Georgia substituted for Greece and Haiti for Colchis, and with the main characters going on and the Greek idea of vengeance and atonement being realized through Mama Leua, a Haitian voodooist, who is like the ancient goddess Hecate." Then, elaborating, "Jason and Medea could have gotten along together, but these passions that move them — ambition, lust, greed — destroy them. They realize what has been wrong when the play comes to its end but it's too late to turn back. The play foreshadows an end of all this, however, as the nineteenth century Medea says:

"The rats been eating at the
seeds of time,
Eaten full the gullet
But the end's coming.' "

Since Mr. Dodson's previous demonstrations of dramatic composition consisted chiefly in an unproduced play written while at college and in one or two shows executed for amateur performances while he was in the Navy, it is not to be wondered that his ambitious plan, which would come near to frightening even a dramatist like O'Neill, who seems rarely to be frightened by anything, has been too much for him. Like various other tyros, he has attempted to enlarge the scope of the "too stingy" drama without first mastering the stingy scope of such dramatists as, say, Ibsen, Strindberg, *et al.* His process of enlargement resolves itself mainly into fancy rhetorical flights which adorn his story like so many artificial beads; in the kind of experiment, however well-intentioned, which operates upon that story to its serio-comic undoing, like a small boy's improvement upon the telephone by attaching the dinner table bell to it; and in a garrulity which, while it undeniably enlarges the script, reduces to a minimum what active drama his theme may intrinsically possess. He might have profited by taking a cue from Charles Sebree's classical stage settings and by writing his play in equally simple terms.

The performance of a mixed company of Negroes and whites was as confused as the materials, only louder.

IT'S A GIFT. MARCH 12, 1945

A comedy by Curt Goetz and Dorian Otvos. Produced by the Goyal Corporation for 47 cut-rate performances in, initially, the Playhouse.

PROGRAM

PROF. THEODORE W. HERRMANN	Curt Goetz	FINNIE, 4	Evelyn Daly
MATILDA HERRMANN	Valerie Van Martens	EMILY	Hilda Laufkoetter
ATLANTA, 17	Julie Harris	REV. ENDICOTT	Whitford Kane
THOMAS, 15	Robert Muscat	HERBERT KRAFT	Michael Strong
PETER, 14	David Green	MAYOR DOUBLEDAY	G. Swayne Gordon
LEWIS, 18	Roland Green	BELINDA	Marjorie Peterson
URSULA, 12	Sally Ferguson	MADAME DE LA JARDINERRE	Suzanne Caubaye
OTTO, 11	William Kinney	ROSITA	Elaine Carter
EVELYN, 10	Yvonne Pothen	CHIQUITA	Hope Miller
DAN, 9	Victor Vraz	LUPE	Doris Brent
SOPHIE, 8	Winnie Mae Martin	DOLORES	Elsa Johnson
ELSIE, 7	Joan Gordon	MR. FLYNN	Morton DaCosta
SANDY, 6	Kevin Mathews		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *The home of Professor Herrmann in Hazelton, Pennsylvania.* Act II. Scene 1. *A house in Montevideo, Uruguay. Six weeks later.* Scene 2. *A few hours later.* Act III. *Professor Herrmann's home. One morning several weeks later.*

Time. 1911.

THERE IS no good reason why it should be so, but let a play come along these days that includes in its cast of characters a State trooper, a Pablo, a Chiquita, or more than one child under twelve years of age and the odds are that it will not be too easy to bear. While *It's A Gift* does not contain either a State trooper or a Pablo, it offers a Chiquita and not merely one child under twelve years of age but all of seven. It also exposes children of fifteen, fourteen, thirteen and twelve, which increases the odds considerably.

For one play like *The Innocent Voyage* which manages to be entertaining despite a liberal supply of youngsters,

one may usually count on at least five that will operate toward depression. The explanation is simple. Children are latterly most often the device of second-rate playwrights who resort to them for ready-made sentimental audience reaction or who employ them physically for a humor which is otherwise beyond their capabilities. The result is usually a stage that seems to substitute them, in much the same way and to the same end, for the small dogs which box-office playwrights were once wont to fall back upon.

The story of the item under immediate discussion is of a morally rigid professor, the head of a copious family, whose sister, exorcised long years before for a sexual indiscretion, upon her death tit for tat wills him and his eldest daughter a great sum of money provided he or she gives issue to an illegitimate child. To further the plot, the authors have resorted to such theatre-album materials as the girls' school mistaken for a bordello, the young daughter mistakenly thought to be with child, the discovery by the parents that their marriage was not legal, etc. While several situations, for all the familiarity of the ingredients, are amusing and while some of the lines are comical, the dialogue too often is reduced to such things as speculating on the early bird that catches the worm ("If the worm didn't get up so early," etc.) and to such jocosities on a woman who has given birth to an impromptu baby as the retort, in answer to the extenuation that she committed only a little mistake, "What did you expect — twins?"

What properly should have been farce is treated as straight comedy, to its additional detriment. Mr. Goetz, one of the authors, known to the pre-war Central European stage, and his wife, Valerie Van Martens, also known to that stage, had the roles of the philoprogenitive father and mother and acquitted themselves, under the circumstances, with a measure of credit.

FOOLISH NOTION. MARCH 13, 1945

A play by Philip Barry. Produced by the Theatre Guild for 103 performances in the Martin Beck Theatre.

PROGRAM

SOPHIE WING	Tallulah Bankhead	ELSIE	Maria Manton
HAPPY HAPGOOD	Joan H. Shepard	JIM HAPGOOD	Henry Hull
FLORENCE DENNY	Barbara Kent	FLORA	Maria Manton
GORDON ROARK	Donald Cook	FLORA	Barbara Kent
ROSE	Mildred Dunnock	FLORA	Mildred Dunnock
HORATIO WING	Aubrey Mather		

SYNOPSIS: *The action of the play takes place in the course of a single evening, in the library on the second floor of Jim Hapgood's house in New York. The time is early November, 1944. Act I. Quarter to nine, according to fact. Act II. Scene 1. Later, as imagined by Gordon. Scene 2. As imagined by Horatio. Scene 3. As imagined by Happy. Act III. Scene 1. Later, as imagined by Sophie. Scene 2. Later, according to fact.*

IT SHOULD BE the right of playwrights and producers to demand of the Actors' Equity Association that its contracts include a clause forbidding actors to give out interviews on the plays in which they are engaged to appear, and in particular before the plays open. An example of the injury such interviews can do was to be had in the case of Tallulah Bankhead, the star of the play here considered. Miss Bankhead spread herself in the public prints in advance of its New York première and ventilated herself in such wise that any person who read what she had to say subsequently approached the play with highly prejudiced misgivings.

"A Barry play is a joy to act because he writes so well," effervesced Miss Bankhead. "He has such humor and insight. Ideas, too. Why, this play is full of them! There's the idea that if you imagine a thing hard enough — a fear or a wish — you get it out of your system. You're free of it. Then there are those lines in the script about not knowing people, even though they're close to us. 'I'm beginning to believe that no one has more than a glimmer about any one

from one minute to the next . . . what they're thinking, what they're hiding . . . what actually goes on in them at all.' Do you see what I mean about the lines being beautifully written?"

The answer was No.

The answer further was No about those great ideas. I for one, for instance, may, my dear Miss Bankhead, imagine as hard as I can the wish that actresses would refrain from such senseless interviews, but the wish still somehow refuses to get out of my system and I am still not free of it. I can also imagine a whole lot of other things so hard that I exhaust myself, but nevertheless my wishes and even my fears stubbornly persist. What is more, that great idea about people not having more than a glimmer of others from one minute to the next, aside from its inordinate age, appeals to me as being sentimental nonsense. The notion that the average person is mysteriously inscrutable is the conviction of persons with brains approximately as profound as those of a correspondence school psychiatrist.

Miss Bankhead, waxing now enthusiastic beyond all bounds, proceeded with her tributes to Barry and his play. What Barry has written in his second act, she bubbled, "are not dream sequences; I hate dreams in a play. They're what some of the characters imagine is going to happen! Then in the last act you see what really does happen." Here, Miss Bankhead paused proudly, apparently convinced that Barry had devised something startlingly new in drama. Miss Bankhead's readers may have been forgiven something of an impolite hiccup. The device has long been familiar in one form or another through use by a variety of playwrights.

While it is true that subsequent attendance upon Barry's effort only re-emphasized the trepidations induced by his discursive star, it still remains that the latter did him an injustice by undoing one's interest in his play some time before its first curtain rose. What one engaged proved, however, that Miss Bankhead had been a first-rate critic of it, albeit in reverse.

The story of the play concerns a famous actress whose writer-husband, missing for five years and believed to have

been killed in battle action, has been declared legally dead and who is about to marry her leading man when news comes that the husband is alive and on his way home. Various characters in the play, the actress, the leading man, the actress' father, and her small adopted daughter, thereupon severally imagine what will happen when he appears, the imaginings being acted out upon the stage. When he does appear, it develops that nothing they have imagined approximates the reality. At the final curtain, the husband declares his intention of marrying a young woman who has been hanging around the house, thus leaving his wife free to wed her co-actor.

On this occasion, as against twelve in the previous night's exhibit, two children are involved in the play: one in the cast of characters and the other, the author. The one in the cast of characters, while she does her share in depressing the audience, is, however, not nearly so instrumental in that direction as the author himself, for the mind that he brings to the play is that of an annoyingly precocious youngster and one given, to boot, to an absurd pretentiousness. Undoubtedly convinced, as at times he has been in the past, that he has evolved something fresh, vital, and rather important in the way of drama, all that his effort amounts to is a helminthic paraphrase of Ferenc Molnár's *The Phantom Rival* (original title, *The Fable Of The Wolf*), shown in the local theatre many years ago by David Belasco, with some of the most childish philosophy conceivable injected into it for extra light weight.

What Master Barry has persuaded himself to believe is a novel dramaturgical idea, but which, as noted, has already and long since seen service, consists only in sneaking out of the venerable dream business by labeling it his characters' imaginations. These so-called imaginations, however, are essentially the same old mechanical stage dreams and, worse, are even more destructive to his play, since they impose upon his actors a garrulity often spared characters who are dreaming and since, further, the species of imagination which he has visited upon them is unfortunately bereft of

any of the misty fancy and cajolery which are part and parcel of the dream state.

In a dream play, the characters' actions are critically acceptable by virtue of the circumstance that their minds are suspended. But when Master Barry asks us to rationalize the actions of fully awake imaginations and yet makes those actions even more grotesque and foolish than the wanton actions induced by dreams he makes an audience in turn doubly conscious of his play's preposterous quality. It takes a highly imaginative dramatist to substitute active imagination for passive dream, and the playwright's imaginations here contributed to his characters are simply the kind that one finds in the Samuel T. French catalogue under the heading of "Children's Charades For School, Church Festival, and Parlor."

Master Barry's gestures toward philosophical wisdom similarly come under the publishers' catalogues' heading, "Juvenile Department." Incorporated into his play, along with a freight of quotations from Scripture and from Socrates, Shakespeare and other famous authors, in the hope of lending it a semblance of weight and gravity, they consist in such revolutionary profundities as were fulsomely hailed by Miss Bankhead in her interview — that no person can really know what another is like, and that the way to rid oneself of anything is to think it out of one's system — and reach their triumphant climax in the argument that the human imagination is never capable of co-ordinating reality and fancy. As for wit, the young master's further trumps take such forms as "The Metro lot is not a happy one," "Sufficient unto the day is the upheaval thereof," "You're a sight for sore eyes if I ever blacked a pair," "There's quite enough in that little head without the Lone Ranger galloping through it," and "Have a night-cap?" — "No thanks, tonight I'll sleep bareheaded."

Miss Bankhead's considerable resources were lost in the kindergarten maze, and the other players, apart from Barbara Kent in the only well-written scene in the play, were no luckier. John C. Wilson's direction was evidently so baf-

fled by the materials in hand that he even succumbed, in the episode depicting the child daughter's imaginings, to making the little one face the audience, throw her head far back and gaze piously at the ceiling like a travesty Joan of Arc, and recite her fancies to an obbligato by her tortured Adam's apple. Jo Mielziner's spaciously handsome library setting only made its contents seem the more puny.

DARK OF THE MOON. MARCH 14, 1945

A legend with music by Howard Richardson and William Berney, the music by Walter Hendl. Produced by the Shuberts for a beyond the season's run in the 46th Street Theatre.

PROGRAM

JOHN	Richard Hart	MR. BERGEN	Allan Tower
CONJUR MAN	Ross Matthew	MR. SUMMEY	Stanley Nelson
THE DARK WITCH	Iris Whitney	MARVIN HUDGENS	John Gifford
THE FAIR WITCH	Marjorie Belle	BARBARA ALLEN	Carol Stone
CONJUR WOMAN	Georgia Simmons	FLOYD ALLEN	Conrad Janis
HANK GUDGER	John Gerstad	MRS. ALLEN	Maidel Turner
MISS METCALF	Frances Goforth	MR. ALLEN	Sherod Collins
MR. JENKINS	Gar Moore	PREACHER HAGGLER	
UNCLE SMEIQUE	Roy Fant		Winfield Hoeny
MRS. SUMMEY	Kathryn Cameron	GREENY GORMAN	
MR. ATKINS	James Lanphier		Dorothy I. Lambert
MRS. BERGEN	Agnes Scott Yost		Marguerite de
EDNA SUMMEY	Milliecent Coleman	DANCING	Anguera
BURT DINWITTY	Robert Pryor	WITCHES	Jinx Heffelfinger
HATTIE HEFFNER	Peggy Ann Holmes		Peggy Ann Holmes
			Lil Liandre

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The peak of a ridge in the Smoky Mountains.* Scene 2. *The central square of Buck Creek.* Scene 3. *The Allen cabin on Chunky Gal Mountain.* Scene 4. *The general store of Buck Creek.* Act II. Scene 1. *A clearing in the woods near Barbara and John's cabin.* Scene 2. *Barbara and John's cabin.* Scene 3. *Same as Scene 1, Act I.* Scene 4. *The Church of God, Buck Creek.* Scene 5. *Same as Scene 1, Act I.*

HERE IS A meritorious contribution to the native drama made to seem largely the opposite by a defective stage production. Though the authors, both still in their twenties, are new to playwriting, they have composed a paraphrastic treatment of the derivative Barbara Allen Carolina hillbilly legend which, for all its occasional lapses and let-downs, manages a combination of eerie fantasy and earthy humor that is frequently impressive and that, in its better portions, achieves a degree of real eloquence.

The story is of a witch-boy of the Great Smokies who craves the love of the human Barbara, who strikes a devil's bargain with a Conjur Woman that in exchange for being himself made human his beloved must remain faithful to him for a year else he return to his original state and she forfeit her life, and who is betrayed through the instrumentality of the superstitious and religious Baptist mountain folk, with the threatened consequences. What any such play calls for is, obviously, adroit staging, shrewd casting, and expert direction. It received none of these. As a result, the inner worth of the script was little perceived by both the lay audiences and a number of the professional critics. Nor were they, considering the obfuscating botch the producers had made of it, overmuch to be blamed.

These are only a few of the things that befell the script. George Jenkins' commendable settings were manipulated in such wise by the careless stagehands that the audience spell was vitiated not only by unscreened guide-lights during what should have been complete darkness while the scene shifting was going on, but by the disconcerting presence of a laggardly stagehand or two on the stage after the lights had gone up on a set. Robert Perry's direction failed to orchestrate the song and ballet numbers with the dramatic text, giving them the aspect of excrescences rather than of an integral part of the play. It also permitted Richard Hart, in the role of the witch-boy, so to shout his lines in the early portions of the fantasy that he had nothing left when it came to his succeeding scenes. The yelling further contrived to make the early scenes seem less part of a fantasy than of the football episodes in George Ade's *The College Widow*. And, even at such points as the director managed relatively better, an amateur note, doubtless as in certain other past instances calculated to impress an audience with the exhibit's naturalness and simplicity (both in quotation marks), was allowed to hover over the whole, with the play taking on the appearance of a liqueur served in a paper cup.

Matters were made worse by the producers' fear of License Commissioner Moss' possible censorship and their ex-

cision from the script of the all-important scene wherein, during a revival meeting, Barbara is seduced by the lowland bully, thus returning her witch-boy lover to the eagles and the moon and guaranteeing her own death. The deletion robbed the play of its climactic moment and killed the effect of what came after. The authors, additionally, at the last moment not only were persuaded to alter a number of their original lines, to the weakening of the scenes in which they figured, but of their own volition changed the original ending of their play, depriving both the final curtain and the play of the evening's most tender and significant moment. As first written, the witch-boy upon being exorcised from humanity glances casually at the dead Barbara lying on a mountain rock and, no longer recognizing her, gropes his way slowly upward wondering who she is. Probably nervous lest someone accuse them of having paralleled the curtain in a play by Jean Giraudoux (*Undine*), they saw fit to eliminate it and to substitute for the casual glance a fixed gaze and for the witch-boy's wonder the line, "Barbara, if only you hadn't been human!" which made the conclusion of their play not a little silly. And, as a final production touch, the witches, properly designed by the authors as not of the broomstick variety but as the personable temptresses out of classic imagination, were disclosed as being considerably more suited to the stage of a musical revue than to the exhibit in immediate question.

An intrinsically often valuable play was thus, among other ways, sacrificed to inexpedient theatrical governorship. Although Hart indicates potentialities as an actor, the casting of him in the leading part was ill-advised, since he lacks experience and declaimed the role instead of acting it. Carol Stone, though serviceable in one or two passages, was also unequal to the part of Barbara, which might more sagaciously have been cast against itself, as the theatrical term has it, with an actress pictorially less imitative of a combination Tallulah Bankhead and Mae West. And while some of the minor roles were both aptly cast and played, others seemed to have been filled with actors of the summer theatre genre for the purpose of saving money.

In conclusion and to repeat, what might in original script have been developed into an impressive stage offering was deprived of its due by its susceptible authors and their cicerones. That script remains by and large, however, the single critically creditable one that has emerged in recent years from either the college or the summer playhouses.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER. MARCH 15, 1945

A comedy by Donald Kirkley and Howard Burman. Produced by Bernard Klawans and Victor Payne-Jennings for 12 performances in the Biltmore Theatre.

PROGRAM

CHARLIE PORTER	Parker Fennelly	BEULAH ROBINSON	Dulcie Cooper
MARTHA WHATCOAT	Kathleen Lockhart	MACK	William Thomson
SAM JARVIS	George Calvert	DINTY	William C. Tubbs
REV. HOMER WHATCOAT	Gene Lockhart	H. A. STILLWATER	Herbert Heyes
ALEC DIXON	Warren Douglas	STUBBS	Nicholas Saunders
RITA COLLINS	Margaret Hayes	STAN	Charles Wallis
DAVID MACDONALD	Barry MacCollum	LIL	Melba Rae
		SHERIFF	Hans Robert

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Morning. Act II. Early afternoon. Act III. Late afternoon.

The entire action of the play takes place in the living-room of Person Homer Whatcoat in a small marrying town in Maryland.

Time. Not so long ago.

COMEDIES CONCERNED with either the deferred or immediate discovery by a couple that its marriage was, for one reason or another, not legal are not altogether a novelty in the theatre, one such, indeed, having again made its appearance only four nights before. The main change in the present manipulators' version of the theme is that they have multiplied the usual single couple by 10,000, all but two of whom, however, remain off-stage, which is a benefit. They have also shifted the emphasis from the hypothetically wedded to the party responsible for their woes, which may be a further fresh touch but which somehow does not seem materially to increase the benefit.

Dealing with an unordained minister in a Maryland marrying mill and with, upon his unmasking, the anticipated alarms of his victims, the comedy, which should have been

written in terms of farce, harks back thirty and more years ago to the day when Roi Cooper Megrue and other playwrights were assiduously bent upon turning out imitations of the kind of things that George M. Cohan, their godfather, could do so very much better. Yet whatever the relative shortcomings of their exhibits were, they at least enjoyed a certain theatrical ingenuity which provided them with some bounce and life. The authors of *Happily Ever After* indicate no such ingenuity until the latter part of their third act comes along, which is a bit late. The earlier portions of their comedy are heavy with strain and, save for a few comical lines, are visibly hard put to it trying to kill time until the last act gets under full way.

Gene Lockhart was amiable enough in the role of the charlatan, at least up to the moment when he was called upon to deliver a moist monologue on the beauties of married life, which took the season's prize for creepy sentimentality. Parker Fennelly and Herbert Heyes as, respectively, his stooge and his old-time colleague in rascality, were the only other members of the company who demonstrated any slightest ability in comedy acting. The stage direction by Crane Wilbur was more appropriate to *Little Eyolf*.

THE DEEP MRS. SYKES. MARCH 19, 1945

A play by George Kelly. Produced by Stanley Gilkey and Barbara Payne for 71 performances in the Booth Theatre.

PROGRAM

MR. SYKES	Neil Hamilton	RALPH	Richard Martin
MRS. SYKES	Catherine Willard	ADELINE	Mary Cildea
ADA	Myra Forbes	ROY	Ralph Glover
MAY	Charlotte Keane	ETHEL	Gwen Anderson
CYRIL	Romney Brent	MRS. TAYLOR	Katherine Anderson
MYRTLE WEAVER	Margaret Bannerman	MR. MANZONI	Tom McElhany
MRS. FENTRISS	Jean Dixon	MR. TAYLOR	Grandon Rhodes

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Living-room in the home of Mr. Sykes. An evening in February. Act II. Drawing-room at Mrs. Taylor's. After dinner, March 20th.

T

HE INTELLECTUAL CONTENT of the plays of the average American playwright would, if poured into a one-ounce bottle, leave ample room for the distillations of the combined profundities of Dino Grandi, Lady Astor, and Mortimer J. Adler. Any considerable intellectual content, it is true, is hardly necessary to the composition of good drama, which, it need not be repeated, remains an emotional rather than a cerebral art. The fact persists, however and nonetheless, that a sufficient number of our playwriting friends elect to pleasure themselves with the opposite view and to employ the medium as a gymnasium wherein to exercise their mental muscles.

These exercises, which embrace their sociological, theological, political, economic, racial, and other theories, and which include their philosophies on love and marriage, pretty generally tend to dispirit the judicious. For, if the truth must be told, they think primarily with their emotions and what results approximates logic to the same degree that "Mairzy Doats" approximates poetry, or music.

It is thus that when we get a play which betrays symp-

toms of adult intelligence we congratulate ourselves, even if the play itself is otherwise not all it should be. This, on both counts, is the case with this offering of Kelly's. As a play viewed critically, it has many things wrong with it. The first of its two acts amounts to little more than toilsome and not too holding exposition and its second, for the most part ably written and interesting, is interrupted to its serious damage by an interminable harangue on the part of a female alcoholic, so screeched as to be exceedingly painful to the eardrums. And the author is hardly to be endorsed for lifting his curtain in the instance of both acts on an empty stage by way of the old Broadway trick of inducing his audience, not knowing what else to do, to applaud the scenery, and for thereafter in each case resorting to the ancient business of bringing on the servants of the household to discuss family and kindred affairs. Yet into much of his play, even when it sags in a dramatic direction, he has introduced character analysis filtered through a shrewd intelligence and he has, besides, treated his basic theme to the ministrations of an alive mind, and these in combination contrive to invest his exhibit, apart from its physical aspects, with a gratifying bounce.

Like Vincent Lawrence a playwright whose purpose it is to explore the easy, superficial character limnings of Broadway drama and to scoop out of their box-office perfumes their constituent less fragrant and less edifying musks, Kelly here digs into the poisonous egotism of the female of the species which, in his words, usually passes for mere feminine jealousy, and analyzes it into the open. If he seems to be bitter, his bitterness does not proceed from himself personally so much as from himself as a kind of scientific dramatist. In this he differs from many of his colleagues who offer us simply their personal prejudices in the guise of profound research, close analysis, and ultimate fact. What he has to say may scarcely be notable for any new discovery, but it at least is sound, which is more than may be allowed of the psychological findings of a liberal share of his contemporaries.

The current passion of various such contemporaries thus

to psychologize their themes and characters is, contrary to general opinion, no later-day development. It got a local head-start toward much of its present absurdity nigh unto forty years ago when Augustus Thomas, an ex-actor who fancied himself as of puissant mind and who was encouraged in his delusion by the critics of the period, had a character in a "psychological" melodrama called *The Witching Hour* think a loaded revolver right off the trigger finger of the man who was about to shoot him. That was the beginning of the psychological gold-rush, and since then playwrights have set themselves to shovel the Freudian, Jung, Stekel and other pay-dirt in carloads.

It is a rare season that does not cough up a sizeable number of plays with a psychological label attached to them, like a tin can to a dog's tail. That the psychology involved is often approximately as convincing as the Schnauser that used to be added to the pair of bloodhounds in an *Uncle Tom's Cabin* troupe by way of making the show advertisable as a "mastodonic" production for the impression of hinterland yokels is borne in upon anyone who ever got beyond Tichenor's sophomore year. And that the probing and revelation of psyches frequently takes on very whimsical forms is lost upon no one but the playwrights themselves.

We accordingly get so-called psychological melodramas whose profound soul surgery rests upon the disclosure, as in *The Stranger*, that a murderer's idiosyncrasies are conditioned on his conviction that prostitutes should be given to more churchgoing; as in *Hand In Glove*, that sexual impotence is alleviated by blood-letting, provided only it be on a big enough scale; and, as in *Sleep, My Pretty One*, that a miscellaneous impulse to murder is a concomitant of mother-love. And we further get plays like *The Perfect Marriage* which gravely argue the sexual coldness which assails wedlock after a long span of years in startling terms of the parties having become a little tired of each other, and still others like *Trio* which betray the staggering psychological news that if a young woman of Lesbian tendencies finally meets a young man whom she passionately loves she will

be impelled to forego her previous amatory peccadillo, at least for a while.

Even at such times as the psychology involved in these and other entrechats may intrinsically be not entirely without merit, its performance on the part of the playwrights minimizes that possible merit to the vanishing point, and makes the exercise generally ridiculous. It seems, indeed, that many a playwright who finds himself momentarily bogged by a character and unable to figure out what the character would logically do under the immediate dramatic circumstances takes the easiest way out of the difficulty by attributing some desperately incorporated extrinsic quality in him to a psychologically induced aberration. For what passes as psychology has apparently come to be to these playwrights what sociological, economic and other disputations are to certain of their playwriting colleagues: something despairingly to fall back upon when their plays are running too thin and in the nature of sugar pills fed hopefully in the guise of strychnine to an audience drooping from dramatic anemia.

Kelly is of a far different cut. His psychological operations are uniformly honest, well-grounded, and sound.

The theme of *The Deep Mrs. Sykes* is developed from a mere bunch of white lilacs sent anonymously to the attractive wife of a neighbor, and demonstrates how the much-vaunted and bogus intuitions of women play havoc with those whom they wrongly suspect and with their own lives. The final touch of the play is fetching theatre. The accomplished concert pianist with whom the youngest of the husbands is infatuated, after playing in the off-stage music room, leaves the scene. The young husband is alone on the stage. Presently from the music room is heard the immature playing of his young wife who deeply loves him and who, aware of his love for the other woman, tries thus pathetically to find a little of that other woman's place for herself in his heart. The playing stops and she comes into the room. The husband's eyes are still on the one who has gone. The young wife comes to him and gently, very gently, tells him that, whereas married others, like him, can find

solace only in their love for someone else, she is content and happy in her love for him alone.

The play suffers, I think, from being cast in the mold of drama rather than high comedy, which might have glossed over the weaknesses it betrays as drama. Its thinness strains dramatic treatment. But that a grown-up mind presides over the stage simultaneously with an inadequate dramatist is obvious.

Of the acting company, Catherine Willard, as the pseudo-intuitive older wife, was much the best. The ordinarily able Jean Dixon, as the vituperative female given to drink, was, largely due to the author's ill-considered direction, a caricature and wholly out of key with the play's tone. That general stage direction, furthermore, was altogether too ponderous and suggested at times an organ playing the *Miserere* at a tea party. It also neglected to caution the actors that the proper pronunciation of the name of the flowers does not happen to be "lilocks."

KISS THEM FOR ME. MARCH 20, 1945

A play, originally called The Lovely Leave, by Luther Davis, based on the novel, Shore Leave, by Frederic Wakeman. Produced by John Moses and Mark Hanna for a beyond the season run in, initially, the Belasco Theatre.

PROGRAM

F. NEILSON	John McGovern	TAILOR	Harold Grau
L.T. COMDR. WALLACE		CHIEF	George Cory
MISSISSIPPI	Edward Crandall	NURSE WILINSKI	Virginia Kaye
MAC	Dennis King, Jr.	CHIEF NURSE	Amy Douglass
ENSIGN	Richard Davis	GUNNER	George Matthews
CREWSON	Douglas Jones	HEDRICK	Dudley Sadler
TURNBILL	Richard Widmark	CHARLIE	Daniel Petrie
WAC	Robert Allen	MR. HARDY	Paul Ford
ALICE	Sonya Stokowski	MRS. HARDY	Patricia Quinn O'Hara
Gwynneth	Judy Holliday		
	Jayne Cotter		

SYNOPSIS: Place, San Francisco. Act I. The living-room of a suite in the St. Mark Hotel; noon. Act II. Officers' solarium in a naval hospital; the following afternoon. Act III. The living-room of the suite again; a few hours later.

STILL ANOTHER in the line of Navy servicemen-on-leave plays, the layout follows, save in minor detail, the usual pattern of boozing, wenching, and the juke-box drama like. Almost everything that has become familiar from plays of a kind is again in evidence: the impudent bravado of the boys with women, the heroine who yields patriotically to a sexual affair with the hero, the comic-relief floozie, the wounded returned hero who delivers himself of the customary affecting monologue, the miscellaneous saucy slaps on female posteriors and the affectionate ditto on male backs, the difficulty of adjustment to civilian surroundings, the boys' nonchalant depreciations of their heroism, etc.

In the present case, there has been an effort to give the old materials a seeming significance, but the significance

signifies only that the author has some very eccentric and mighty silly ideas. For example, he heatedly criticizes civilians in connection with the war effort and chooses as his especial target for ridicule a ship-builder who has served the effort loyally and handsomely. He derides this competent man and presents him as his play's villain simply because he wishes a naval aviator on leave and bent solely on getting drunk and consorting with loose women to take an hour or so off, talk to the shipyard workers about the war, and thus help to discourage absenteeism. He also sneers elaborately at what he dubs the "paper Navy" for its red-tape (the red-tape in his mind being strict attention to registry documents, careful methods of hospitalization, and the like) because it sometimes gets in the way of servicemen's good times when on leave. It is his significant conviction, apparently, that the Navy would be a lot better if it were run like a Chicago night club.

To bespeak an audience's sympathy with three flyers out for a hot time who insult honest and faithful civilian effort and necessary and important Navy routine and who accompany their derogations with constant booze swilling and fornicatory gestures at womenfolk seems to be asking almost as much as bespeaking that audience's distaste for a valuable ship-builder simply because he doesn't relish a flyer's suggestive passes at his fiancée and for a hospital staff for thoughtlessly preventing servicemen from sneaking away and getting drunker than ever.

I had believed that the venerable final curtain on the heroine's "I'll be waiting" had long since gone into the discard for all time but, sure enough, here it was again.

The presenting company was in the aggregate personally satisfactory. Herman Shumlin's direction varied from good to very bad. Certain passages he handled well enough, but the conduct of the flyers in the first act suggested too greatly that they were members of a *Boys Of Company B* cast and their conduct in part of the last act that they must be members of the *Russian Navy*.

The play marked No. 32 in the series of the drama in uniform.

SWEET GENEVIEVE. MARCH 20, 1945

A comedy by Mary G. and Marchette Chute. Produced by the authors plus Joy Chute and Mina Cole for one performance in the President Theatre.

PROGRAM

MRS. QUIGLEY	Grace Kleine	MRS. MARTIN	Ruth Grubbs
JOEL	Sam Banham	MRS. RUTHERFORD	Nolia Trammel
GENEVIEVE	Roslyn Weiss	MR. RUTHERFORD	Hal Hershey
MR. QUIGLEY	Jay Davis	MR. LARCHMONT	Paul Rapport
DAISY	Ruth Manning		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A room on the third floor of Mrs. Quigley's rooming house on the lower East Side of Manhattan. A June evening in 1886. Act II. The same. The following morning. Act III. The same. The afternoon of the following day.

THE THREE Chute sisters and a friend of the family's, Miss Cole, hired the little President Theatre in the West Forty-eighth Street spaghetti and delicatessen belt for the display of two of the sisters' maiden dramatic effort. The effort, termed a "romantic comedy," related the elopement in 1886 of a young couple, their honeymoon in a rooming house on the lower East Side of Manhattan, and the manner in which the bride's mother, who had objected to the marriage, became reconciled when she learned to her relief that a neighbor's baby was not, as she had feared, the illegitimate consequence of an act participated in by her daughter. Neither the playwriting Chutes nor the producing Chute and her associate girl friend indicated the faintest degree of talent for anything even remotely connected with the theatre.

ETERNAL CAGE. MARCH 21, 1945

A play by Jules Denes. Produced by C. Sherman Hoyt for 9 performances and a total intake of 296 dollars in the Barbizon-Plaza Theatre.

PROGRAM

ROBERT DUNCAN	Frank Gibney	FRANCES HARRINGTON
MARION DUNCAN	Sheila Bromley	Johanna Douglas
WALTER WHITFORD	George Blackwood	DON ANTONIO RODRIGUEZ
VIVIAN LAKE	Frances Dale	William Forrest

SYNOPSIS: The entire action takes place in the Duncan living-room, New York City. Time. The present. Scene 1. Afternoon. Scene 2. The dream. Act II. The dream continued. Act III. Again that afternoon.

THOUGH MR. DENES, a Hungarian, is alleged to have had experience in both dramatic authorship and stage production in his native land, there was here no evidence of either. His play, dealing with the wife of a physician who rebels at his dictatorship over her and who drinks herself into a dream wherein she fancies what she would do if she were rid of his influence, is a strictly amateur performance, and minus merit in any direction. And his staging of the script was no more professional. Mr. Hoyt, the producer, is a wealthy yachtsman and Mr. Denes' friend. Friendship could go no farther, though wisdom might have shortened the distance to the profit of both.

THE FIREBRAND OF FLORENCE

MARCH 22, 1945

A musical show originally called Much Ado About Love, derived from Edwin Justus Mayer's comedy, The Firebrand, by Mr. Mayer, Ira Gershwin and Kurt Weill. Produced by Max Gordon for 43 performances and a loss of 225,000 dollars in the Alvin Theatre.

PROGRAM

HANGMAN	Randolph Symonette	CELLINI	Earl Wrightson
TARTMAN	Don Marshall	CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD	Charles Sheldon
SOUVENIR MAN	Bert Freed	OTTAVIANO	Ferdi Hoffman
MAFFIO	Boyd Heathen	ASCANIO	James Dobson
ARLECCHINO	Jean Guelis	EMELIA	Gloria Story
COLUMBINA	Norma Gentner	ANGELA	Beverly Tyler
PIEROT	Eric Kristen	MARQUIS	Paul Best
FLOMINA	Diane Meroff	DUKE	Melville Cooper
PANTALONE	Hubert Bland	PAGE	Billy Williams
FIORINETTA	Mary Alice Bingham	DUCHESS	Lotte Lenya
GELFOMINO	Kenneth Le Roy	MAJOR-DOMO	Walter Graf
ROSANIA	Mary Grey	CLERK OF THE COURT	Alan Noel
DOTTORE	William Vaux		
MAGISTRATE	Marion Green		

Locale. Florence and Paris.

Time. 1535.

IT WAS Compton Mackenzie, I believe, who years ago employed the title, "Florence On A Certain Night," for a book of verse. The management might well have negotiated for its use, since *The Firebrand Of Florence* altogether too much suggests Laura Jean Libbey with her sequent particles and invokes the temptation on the part of the show's critics to dub it *The Firebrand Of Florence, or Max Gordon's False Step*, which, though very sound criticism, would be deplorable in the habitually polite.

This marks the second unsuccessful attempt to convert Mayer's amusing comedy of two decades ago about the ri-

valry of glandular Benvenuto Cellini and the arid Duke into the musical form. Some seventeen years back the late publisher, Horace Liveright, aided and abetted by the late banker, Otto Kahn, offered a version called *The Dagger And The Rose* that never got beyond its try-out in Atlantic City. The culprits on that occasion were Isabel Leighton (book), Edward Eliscu (lyrics), and Eugene Berton (music).

With on this occasion enough money invested in the exhibit to float a battleship, Gordon has floated only a tow-boat, desperately chugging away and pulling at nothing. He here demonstrates that an infinite capacity for taking pains and genius have nothing at all in common, for though his production indicates all kinds of hard work he gets barely nearer to what a musical show should be than the herein-before noted Mrs. Dresselhuys, which may be allowed by those who suffered the latter's *Rhapsody* to be some distance. A few fair tunes are there, and the period costumes have sufficient color, and Melville Cooper and the attractive Gloria Story help in so far as they can. But otherwise, from book to John Murray Anderson's stage direction, from principals to small-part actors, and from Jo Mielziner's scenery to this and that, Mayer's comedy has been turned into something that lacks only a little music by Wagner in Weill's stead to constitute it a first-rate funeral.

While Ira Gershwin's lyrics here and there offer a momentary hint of his erstwhile skill, they more often descend to such stuff as "I know where there's a nosey cook — My lord, you mean a cozy nook." A lyric, furthermore, in which the singer strives vainly for a rhyme with Angela the while, after theoretically hilarious pauses and triumphant looks at the audience, he succeeds in negotiating such rhymes as needeth for Edith and so on, is hardly more to the credit of the talented lyricist of *Of Thee I Sing* and a half dozen other shows than such souvenirs of the musical stage of the early nineteen hundreds as are sufficiently suggested by titles like "There Was Life, There Was Love, There Was Laughter," "When The Duchess Is Away," and "Come To Paris."

The book, though Mayer himself worked on it, has lost

all trace of the entertainment value of its source and plods its heavy way like a *The Vagabond King* in water-soaked boots. Poor Cooper, a nutritious comedian when given half a chance, is condemned in his attempts at a little relieving humor to such lines, in reply to a pert girl who describes herself as a lady-in-waiting, as "Well, you won't have to wait long." Though he earns double his salary by bequeathing it a final hiccup and by trying to make the audience forget it in allowing his elbow to miss the edge of the table at which he is seated (both gratis), his virtuosity avails him not, and the evening continues on its *Rhapsody* course.

It surely is not too much to ask of a show treating of the amours of Cellini that it have something of a romantic air, and that air is scarcely to be achieved with a stageful of people, excepting only the aforementioned Story girl, who look and act like a *Night Must Fall* company dressed up for a Garibaldi birthday celebration, in Peekskill. Earl Wrightson, as the famous lover, has a good baritone voice which serves the occasion when it is devoted to song but which, when it lapses into dialogue, sounds considerably less like the hypnotic Benvenuto than like Benay Venuta. To the role of Angela, Cellini's beloved model, Beverly Tyler, imported for the event from Hollywood, brings a voice notable chiefly for flattening the higher notes and a stage demeanor still so awkward that she must needs heavily finger her skirts this way and that in order to conceal the woodenness of her gait. The ladies of the ensemble, furthermore, for the greater share resemble Mr. David O. Selznick, and many of the males would provide perfect illustrations for the tales of the Brothers Grimm.

Costume musicals are frequently, even at their best, fertile in stage embarrassment. From theatrical time immemorial, tights have had an obscene way of wrinkling at the knees and making any impassioned love duet wherein the heroine proclaims their wearer the peer of Apollo rather less convincing than one might wish. The motion pictures enjoy an advantage in this respect. The camera can cut off the Apollo at the waistline and thus to a degree sustain the illusion. But the stage is helpless in the situation and un-

avoidably has to pay the price. The movies, too, can similarly maneuver the unsightly hooks and eyes and zippers on the women's costumes out of audience vision and so encourage the fancy that in the theatre has trouble reconciling such eye-sores with a squad of hypothetically ethereal Beatrices. And the films can manipulate further trivialities in such a manner that they do not invade the romantic mood. That the costume pictures themselves are otherwise generally much worse than their stage counterparts does not obscure their superiority in these minor details, which should provide an almost colossal satisfaction to the hereinbefore mentioned Mr. Mamoulian and other of their enthusiasts.

It takes music of an uncommon sort to make any stage costume show capture the necessary fragrant mood. Even the best book has a time of it competing with the waywardly realistic mood of later-day audiences. And when the book is as sour as that of this *The Firebrand Of Florence* it would require the services of Lehár, Eysler, Kalman and Victor Herbert operating in combination and at the top of their form to win over those audiences to it, or to get them, at the least, to suspend judgment regarding it. Weill is a lightly pleasant composer who at times, notably in *The Three Penny Opera*, has written proficiently. But he hasn't the strength or the fulness of musical imagination and resource to work any such miracle in this case. Some of his melodies, indeed, not only do not distract their auditors from the yesterday aspect of the show but fix their attention grimly on the yesterday aspect of the melodies themselves. I have in my day engaged so many musical shows that I can't remember all the songs in them, but if I haven't long since heard some that sounded very much like some of these of Weill's my ear is less reliable than I think.

THE BARRETT'S OF WIMPOLE STREET
MARCH 26, 1945

A revival of the play by Rudolf Besier. Produced by Katherine Cornell for 87 performances in the Ethel Barrymore Theatre.

PROGRAM

DOCTOR CHAMBERS	Russell Gaige	HENRY MOULTON-BARRETT	
ELIZABETH BARRETT MOULTON-BARRETT	Katharine Cornell	Roger Stearns	
WILSON	Brenda Forbes	GEORGE MOULTON-BARRETT	Keinert Wolff
HENRIETTA MOULTON-BARRETT	Emily Lawrence	EDWARD MOULTON-BARRETT	
ARABEL MOULTON-BARRETT	Patricia Calvert	BELLA HEDLEY	McKay Morris
OCTAVIUS MOULTON-BARRETT	Erik Martin	HENRY BEVAN	Betty Brewer
ALFRED MOULTON-BARRETT	Stanley Parlan	ROBERT BROWNING	Roger Stearns
CHARLES MOULTON-BARRETT	Howard Otway	DOCTOR FORD-WATERLOW	Brian Aherne
		CAPTAIN SURTEES COOK	Ivan Simpson
		FLUSH	Chester Stratton
			Himself

SYNOPSIS: This comedy was played in Elizabeth Barrett's bed-sitting-room at 50, Wimpole Street, London, in 1845. Act I. Scene 1. The evening of the 19th of May. Scene 2. The afternoon of the following day. Act II. Three months later. Act III. Scene 1. Some weeks later. Scene 2. The following week.

SURROUNDED BY virtually the same company that was associated with her in the one hundred and forty performances of the play for American troops in Italy, France and the Netherlands, Miss Cornell's reception on the opening night was but slightly less thunderous than that accorded the late Admiral Dewey on his triumphant return from the Philippines. Accepting it with a gracious, if faintly whimsical smile, she then entered into the role of Elizabeth Barrett in which she had made so agreeable an impression all of fourteen and, in revival, ten years ago and attested to the fact that, when it comes to romantic parts of a kind, she still

possesses that quality of dark fascination and vocal harmony which so satisfactorily adorns them. As the Robert Browning of the familiar romance, Mr. Aherne, again in his old role, indicated that the intervening years he had spent before a Hollywood camera had taken their customary toll of a dramatic actor and offered a performance bordering on travesty. And the support in the aggregate was mediocre.

Besier's exhibit, it need hardly be repeated, is a theatre-wise treatment of the two poets' love affair which unfolds on the stage with considerable greasepaint brio. It remains as efficient a star vehicle, if as critically dubious a play, as when first shown. Since it deals with celebrated literary figures it is naturally accepted by the preponderance of theatregoers as a literary play, which it is only superficially. But it so "humanizes" its protagonists that what in less skilled hands would emerge merely as historically labeled ventriloquial dummies here emerge as moderately alive figures, albeit with a heavy splash of purple makeup on their faces.

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU
MARCH 26, 1945

A revival of the farce-comedy by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman. Produced by Frank McCoy for 17 performances in the City Center Theatre.

PROGRAM

PENELOPE SYCAMORE	Daisy Atherton	HENDERSON	Edward Kreisler
ESSIE	Dorothy Stone	TONY KIRBY	Richard Maloy
RHEBA	Eula Belle Moore	BORIS KOLENKHOV	Charles Collins
PAUL SYCAMORE	John Souther	GAY WELLINGTON	Emma Bunting
MR. DE PINNA	Donald Keyes	MR. KIRBY	John Clubley
ED	Lance Cunard	MRS. KIRBY	Dorothy Scott
DONALD	Charles Benjamin	THREE MEN	{ Spencer Sawyer Charles Foley
MARTIN VANDERHOF	Fred Stone	OLGA	George McLain Ulla Kazanova
ALICE	Lucile Marsh		

SYNOPSIS: The scene is the home of Martin Vanderhof, of New York. Act I. A Wednesday evening. Act II. A week later. Act III. The next day.

THE CITY CENTER pursued again its second-hand road show policy with the display of the 1936-37 farce-comedy in a performance so inferior to the original that its humorous quality was largely lost. While Fred Stone has long been held in affection by the theatre public, and properly, that affection has been for him as an individual rather than as an actor. As an actor, whether in musical shows or in his occasional later ventures into straight plays, he has always been and remains little more than a vaudevillian with a limited equipment. Take away the acrobatics and mechanical props with whose aid he rose in older days to celebrity and his lack of a real comedian's resources are laid bare. His talents, in the literal sense, have need of a springboard.

His assistants here, including his daughter Dorothy and his son-in-law, Charles Collins, were no better fitted to distil the laughter from the script, and the eccentric Sycamore

household, which once had its audiences roaring, acquired the flavor less of the gay lunatic asylum it previously was than of a Sunday school with a few tacks on its benches.

The City Center concluded the season with a showing for two and one-half weeks beginning on May 2 of the originally admirable *Carmen Jones* in a cut-down producton designed for the road which, while it could not obscure its virtues, materially reduced its former theatrical power.

LADY IN DANGER. MARCH 29, 1945

A comedy-mystery by Max Afford, adapted by Alexander Kirkland. Produced by Pat Allen and Dan Fisher for 12 performances in the Broadhurst Theatre.

PROGRAM

BILL SEFTON	James Gannon	KARL KURT	Paul Fairleigh
MONICA SEFTON	Helen Claire	CHIEF INSPECTOR BURKE	Clarence Derwent
MISS HODGES	Elfrieda Derwent	DETECTIVE DENNIS MARSH	Ronald Alexander
DR. FRANCIS GRESHAM	Alexander Kirkland	CONSTABLE POGSON	Hudson Faussett
SYLVIA MEADE	Vicki Cummings	FREDERICK SMITH	Gary Blivers
ANDREW MEADE	Rodney McLennan		

SYNOPSIS: Action of the play takes place in the Seftons' apartment, Villa Flats, Melbourne, Australia, during a summer evening. Act I. Scene 1. 6 p.m. Scene 2. 11.30 p.m. Act II. About 1 a.m. Act III. Scene 1. One hour later. Scene 2. Immediately following.

MISTER AFFORD is an Australian radio script writer whose play, his first, was produced successfully Down Under. In its original form its scene was laid in London and its knave was a Nazi spy. In Mr. Kirkland's adaptation the scene has been shifted to Australia and the knave converted into a Japanese spy. In both cases it remains largely the conventional espionage mystery number, if much worse and much duller than usual, in which miladi, her visage permanently wrinkled in apprehension, is murderously stalked by the villain and in which the creepiness is that of a small child on all fours rather than anything associated with adult foreboding. It is, further, the sixtieth mystery play failure out of the previous dozen seasons' plus this season's sixty-seven attempts.

The nonsense involves the following:

- Item. A cat with poisoned claws that scratches the victims to death.
- Item. The body that falls out of the closet.

- Item. The heroine who is a writer of mystery stories.
- Item. The dumb detective.
- Item. The wise-cracking female friend of the heroine.
- Item. The newspaper reporter whose appetite for gin does not blunt his great sapience.
- Item. The circumstantial evidence against the heroine that wouldn't fool anyone but the Messrs. Afford and Kirkland.
- Item. The eavesdropping female servant.
- Item. The doused lights and the flashlights in the dark.
- Item. The scream.
- Item. The heavy comedy-relief consisting chiefly of jokes about the lavatory.
- Item. The Japanese agents who speak with a thick German accent.

The members of the acting company, though given to such locutions, in reference to the corpus of the deceased, as "the prostate body," did not, however, like various such otherwise illiterate acting companies, fail in the customary pronunciation of the word "record" with the painstaking precision of the president of the fashionable Negro country club in *Carmen Jones*.

THE GLASS MENAGERIE. MARCH 31, 1945

A play by Tennessee Williams, with incidental music by Paul Bowles. Produced by Eddie Dowling and Louis J. Singer for a far beyond the season run in the Playhouse.

PROGRAM

THE MOTHER	Laurette Taylor	THE GENTLEMAN CALLER
HER SON	Eddie Dowling	Anthony Ross
HER DAUGHTER	Julie Haydon	

*A play in two parts.
An alley in St. Louis.
Part 1. Preparation for a gentleman caller.
Part 2. The gentleman calls.
The alley.
Time. Now and the past.*

IT HAS BEEN MORE or less clear for some time now that if our stage hopes for anything approaching dramatic delicacy and beauty it will have to look largely to a one-time soft-shoe dancer and song writer, of all people, to supply it. For if there is another producer like Eddie Dowling who is willing to risk things like *Shadow And Substance*, *The White Steed*, *Love's Old Sweet Song*, *The Time Of Your Life*, *Magic*, *Hello, Out There*, and this *The Glass Menagerie*, let me have his name and I shall be delighted to indite a testimonial like this to him, too. But I myself can not at the moment think of him, and I have been thinking hard. I can, in short, think of no other present producer, despite his periodic touching tributes to himself, whose honest and closest desire is to bring to our theatre that type of drama which possibly departs the security of the box-office for a brave flight into those upper reaches of a human spirit far removed from Broadway.

He has been a poor man in worldly goods, this Dowling, and at times, having less than two hundred dollars in the bank to support his wife and child, has been compelled to

undertake pitiable side jobs for others, such as *Madame Capet*, *Manhattan Nocturne* and *This Rock*, to get a little living money. But let him find a play that no other producer would touch and which his critical sense tells him has some qualities of worth and loveliness and, if he has a spare nickel to his name, he will go out and beg, borrow or steal the rest of the money needed to get it a hearing.

It has often been heartbreaking for him in a lot of ways. The Shuberts, who helped him out with the necessary funds to produce *Shadow And Substance*, lost all faith in the play when it was tried out in Pittsburgh and it was only his pleadings that kept them from closing it after the one week's engagement there. The Theatre Guild, whose dollars helped him to put on *The Time Of Your Life*, horned in on the production and made such a scenic mess of it that all seemed lost until Armina Marshall judiciously countered the masterminds into letting him have his own way. His adventures in the instance of *Love's Old Sweet Song* were enough, before he finally got the first New York curtain up, to drive another man to suicide. His troubles with Schuyler Watts, who backed him in the production of a program of delightful short plays by O'Casey and Saroyan and who had ideas of his own as to how they should be done, were so great that he found it impossible, after a Princeton, New Jersey, try-out, to bring the production into New York. And now most lately in the case of this *The Glass Menagerie*, which has turned out in the majority opinion of the reviewers to be the year's finest theatrical adventure, his hope to persuade the Theatre Guild to lend the play its subscription audiences was firmly blasted by Theresa Helburn, who, even after viewing it during its successful Chicago run, said that it was much too dangerously fragile to be sure of making money in New York and, besides, that the Guild had another play already scheduled, which peculiarly never materialized.

But that was only a drop in the overflowing bucket of Dowling's trials and disappointments. In its opening week in Chicago, the play took in a mere 3,300 dollars at the box-office, which represented so heavy a loss that Singer, Dowl-

ing's co-producer who had put up the money for the production, was all for closing it then and there. Supporting him in his decision was not only Alex Yokel, the company manager, but even Harry Davies, the press-agent. And once again Dowling had to argue, shout and implore that the play be given another week's chance to prove itself. To his aid came Ashton Stevens, Claudia Cassidy, and several other Chicago critics who admired the play, and the week of grace followed, and the receipts slowly climbed, and prosperity came to a production that, if the others had had their way, would have been summarily consigned to the storehouse. Moreover, when Dowling subsequently tried to book the play into the Playhouse in New York while it was still running in Chicago, Harry Fromkes, that theatre's owner who previously had booked a steady succession of prompt failure rubbish like *Sophie, Sleep, My Pretty One, A Goose For The Gander, Hand In Glove, The Stranger*, etc., hesitated for almost three weeks to give the play, after seeing it and liking it though believing it not to have box-office possibilities, the longed-for booking and did so at length only when contracts giving him sufficiently rewarding terms were agreed upon.

I sometimes hear it said that I am prejudiced in Dowling's favor. What I hear said, believe me, is damned true. I am prejudiced in Dowling's favor as I would be in the case of any man who, like him, places the pride of the theatre above a potential fat purse, who is not afraid of risky but meritorious plays, and who is willing for weeks and even months to subsist on doughnuts and tea if it will allow him eventually to realize some little dream he may have.

The Glass Menagerie, not as a play but as a production, marks the high-light thus far in this Dowling's career. It provides by long odds the most imaginative evening that the stage has offered in this season. Originally written as a rather freakish "experiment" and replete with such delicatessen as the moving picture titles of silent cinema days thrown intermittently on the scenery, it has been metamorphosed under Dowling's guidance into the unaffected and warming simplicity that it should have had in the first place.

Deficient in any touches of humor, since Williams forthrightly confesses himself to be a playwright with none, it has been embroidered under that same guidance with suggested flashes of humor. Its narrator character, like most gratuitous and faultily incorporated narrator characters originally the routine wooden *compère*, has similarly been rewritten into a measure of reason and plausibility; and little things like, for example, the final illumination of the grinning father's portrait, the final tossing of the play into the lap of the audience's imagination, etc., have transformed the script into a medium over which the arts of the theatre can and do play their most hypnotic colors.

The play, which is intrinsically rather less a play than a palette of sub-Chekhovian pastels brushed up into a charming semblance of one, has had everything possible brought to it for its production effect, which is demonstratedly pretty fine. Jo Mielziner's setting of the St. Louis alley and dowdy flat, with the latter's draperies and scrims ingeniously fashioned to catch his unusually expert lighting, itself catches perfectly the mood of a play that also consists almost entirely in mood. Dowling's direction, with some assistance from Laurette Taylor and, to a considerably less extent, Margo Jones, orchestrates the whole in key with Paul Bowles' engaging musical obbligato. And the acting is the best example of ensemble work that has been observable on the season's stage. Miss Taylor hits her peak as the now frowzy Southern belle of other days desperately set upon achieving a husband for her lame daughter; hers is a rare performance. Dowling, bereft of his occasional pietistic manner, is completely natural and at ease as the son with his father's wanderer's feet. Miss Haydon's crippled daughter is not the usual, standardized limping Broadway actress with the greasepaint brave smile but a creature crippled deeply in inner spirit. And Anthony Ross as her lost lover rounds out the acting quartet with a healthy believability.

The play received the award of the New York Drama Critics' Circle as the season's best.

A PLACE OF OUR OWN. APRIL 2, 1945

A play by Elliott Nugent. Produced by John Golden, in association with the author and Robert Montgomery, for 8 performances in the Royale Theatre.

PROGRAM

MARGIE JOHNS	Toni Favor	MARY LORIMER
PETE REIS	John Howes	Mercedes McCambridge
NANCY MONROE	Jeanne Cagney	AUGUSTA Lotta Palfi
CHARLES REDDY	Robert Keith	HENRY BARFUSS Jack Howard
JESSE WARD	Seth Arnold	MIKE McGROARTY Anthony Blair
DAVID MONROE	John Archer	JOE KAPLAN Wolfe Barzell
SAM REDDY	J. C. Nugent	MRS. BRANDT Helen Carew

SYNOPSIS: Act I. *The living-room in the Reddy home. March.* Act II. *An evening in September.* Act III. Scene 1. *Three weeks later.* Scene 2. *Late November.*

The action takes place in the town of Calais, Ohio, in the year 1919.

THE PLAY IS the old one about the young, idealistic newspaper editor in conflict with villainously selfish interests who try to do him in. The author has sought to give it a little renewed life by basing the conflict on the latter's opposition to Woodrow Wilson's plans for world peace (the scene is laid in 1919) and by belaboring the obvious later day analogy, but he can not hide his script's betraying crow's-feet. As if disappointedly conscious of the fact, he abandons the Wilson hocus-pocus half-way through his play and thereafter frankly peddles the other old stuff about the hero's marital difficulties (his wife suspects him of intimacy with another woman, etc.) and the troubles he and his wife have with his father-in-law. Both sections of the play are equally bilious.

The dramaturgy is no better. If the author has to get a character off the stage and knows no way in which plausibly to manage it, he has a telephone bell ring for no honest reason in the adjoining room. In order to establish the period of his play, he fumblingly resorts to such business as having

a character read a popular novel of the period, or jokingly allude to Mark Hanna, or refer to the dubiety of Prohibition liquor, or play a 1919 tune on the phonograph. And his attempts at humor take such turns as having a character observe that Virginia is the mother of Presidents and causing another to ask, "Virginia who?"

The acting company, excepting John Archer as the protagonist. Wilson crusader and J. C. Nugent as a comic-relief grandfather, harried the already harried script, as did the author's stage direction.

The play was the thirty-fourth that included the military uniform.

STAR SPANGLED FAMILY. APRIL 5, 1945

A play, originally called Star Spangled Widow, by B. Harrison Orkow. Produced by Philip A. Waxman and Joseph Kipness for 5 performances in the Biltmore Theatre.

P R O G R A M

GWEN PURCHASE	Dennie Moore	"BUD" JONES	Donald Devlin
MESSENDER	Byron Griffith	MARGARET JONES	Jean Adair
SALLY JONES	Frances Reid	HARRY LUFINSKY	Stephen Morrow
PAUL	Harlan Stone	VICTOR GUNTHER	Leon Charles
HAROLD	Franklin Allen	GLEN	Jimmy Sommer
MERVIN MITCHELL	Lewis Charles	NURSE CRAIG	Mary Best
DR. RICHARD MORLEY	Edward Nugent	DR. NEWTON	Bram Nossen

SYNOPSIS: Act I. A late spring afternoon during the first year after we have won the war. Act II. Scene 1. A week later. Scene 2. One month later. Act III. Scene 1. Four days later. Scene 2. Two hours later.

The Scene. The entire action takes place in Sally Jones' living-room in a mid-Manhattan apartment.

WHO THE AUTHOR IS, the available records this side of Hollywood do not reveal. One thing, however, is certain, and that is that he is not a playwright. Judging from this whatnot, he is rather a person who believes that all that is needed for dramaturgy is to write a pulp magazine story, scissor out of it the "he says" and "she replieds," and put it on a stage with a constantly ringing door-bell. His dia-logic splendor is to be perceived from such specimens as "That can not be Dr. Morley ringing the buzzer as men of science are always precise," "It is too delightfully utter," and "Intellectuals seem always to crowd one's living-room these days"; his humor concerns such things as the magazines in dentists' offices; and his contribution to character analysis consists in the belief that whenever a person is nervous or distraught he will invariably drop whatever he may be holding in his hand.

For his theme, Mr. Orkow has dug into the bottom of

the warehouse chest and pulled out the plot of the child who resents his mother's second marriage, which has served at least two dozen plays in the *Wednesday's Child* catalogue. Thinking to give it a contemporary countenance he has made the deceased father a war hero whom the child worshipped, but the play remains its old self nonetheless, if infinitely poorer than any previously displayed. The direction by William Castle, another Hollywood genius, simply stood the actors on the stage and had them recite their speeches as at a high-school commencement exercise. And the actors in the aggregate were the kind who mistook an appearance of personal apathy for histrionic naturalness and who articulated the phrase "at all" as if a noun regularly followed it.

 CAROUSEL. APRIL 19, 1945

A musical play, based on Ferenc Molnár's Liliom, book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, music by Richard Rodgers. Produced by the Theatre Guild for a far beyond the season run in the Majestic Theatre.

PROGRAM

CARRIE PIPPERIDGE	Jean Darling	JENNIE	Joan Keenan
JULIE JORDAN	Jan Clayton	VIRGINIA	Ginna Moise
MRS. MULLIN	Jean Casto	SUSAN	Suzanne Tafe
BILLY BIGELOW	John Raitt	JONATHAN	Richard H. Gordon
JUGGLER	Lew Foldes	SECOND POLICEMAN	Larry Evers
FIRST POLICEMAN	Robert Byrd	CAPTAIN	Blake Ritte
DAVID BASCOME	Franklyn Fox	FIRST HEAVENLY FRIEND (BROTHER JOSHUA)	Jay Velasquez
NETTIE FOWLER	Christine Johnson	SECOND HEAVENLY FRIEND	
JUNE GIRL	Pearl Lang		Tom McDuffie
ENOCH SNOW	Eric Mattson	STARKEEPER	Russell Collings
JIGGER CRAIGIN	Murvyn Vye	ENOCH SNOW, JR.	Ralph Linney
HANNAH	Annabelle Lyon	LOUISE	Bambi Linney
BOATSWAIN	Peter Birch	CARNIVAL BOY	Robert Pagan
ARMINY	Connie Baxter	PRINCIPAL	Lester Freedman
PENNY	Marilyn Merkt		

SYNOPSIS: Time. 1873-1888. Prelude. An amusement park on the New England coast. May. Act I. Scene 1. A tree-lined path along the shore. A few minutes later. Scene 2. Nettie Fowler's spa on the ocean front. June. Act II. Scene 1. On an island across the bay. That night. Scene 2. Mainland waterfront. An hour later. Scene 3. Up there. Scene 4. Down here. On a beach. Fifteen years later. Scene 5. Outside Julie's cottage. Scene 6. Outside a schoolhouse. Same day.

IT IS NOW some years since Jerome Kern, who succeeded Victor Herbert as the first composer of the contemporary theatre, dispossessed himself of all his books and thus prepared himself for acceptance by Hollywood, where he has posthumously quartered his talents. Along with the books, which constituted one of the most valuable private libraries in the country, he dispossessed himself of his quondam

theatre collaborator, Oscar Hammerstein II, who with him had written, among other things, *Show Boat* and *Music In The Air*, two of the most valuable of all American musical plays, and who, as has since been attested by *Oklahoma!*, *Carmen Jones*, etc., has become the first music show bookman and lyricist of the contemporary stage. With Kern's disappearance, Hammerstein has allied himself with Richard Rodgers, who now in turn seems to be taking over Kern's place in the compositional van. Together, they form an uncommonly able team.

Carousel follows their remarkably successful *Oklahoma!* and follows it with exceptional credit. Hammerstein's treatment of the Molnár play happily abstains from any inclination to reduce it to the whims of Broadway; he allows it with but minor amendments to retell its lovely and affecting story of the bully who can express his inarticulate love only by beating the woman of his heart, of that woman's deep, silent, and infinitely patient love for him, and of his day's release from the purgatory whence death in a planned robbery has dispatched him by way of permitting him at length to do one good act on earth that may redeem his soul. The scene has been shifted from modern Hungary to the New England coast of the 1870's and 1880's, but the essence of the fantasy remains. Only in the unfortunate inclusion of two or three specimens of Broadway humor such as, for example, a girl's pleading with a man to say something sweet to her and his rejoinder, "Boston cream pie," and in the occasional careless employment of such anachronistic slang as "drip" and the twentieth-century sort has Hammerstein lapsed. His lyrics, furthermore, are of a simple flavor in keeping with the tone of the book, avoiding any of the over-tricky and strained rhymes so close to the vanity of his lyric writing contemporaries and resolving themselves into the pleasant innocence of songs like "This Was A Real Nice Clambake," "Geraniums In The Winder," "When I Marry Mr. Snow," "When The Children Are Asleep," "June Is Bustin' Out All Over," and the kind.

Rodgers' score is one of his very best. His "If I Loved

You" is as good as Kern at the top of his old form, and his "You'll Never Walk Alone" and others are exactly what the fable calls for.

Rouben Mamoulian's staging forgives him for the affectations and euthanasian ormolu with which he overlaid *Sadie Thompson*, though his undue prolongation of the death scene in the second act induces in the restive audience the feeling that it is attending the joint demise of Camille and Little Eva, and though he privileges Agnes de Mille's beach ballet, albeit original and attractive, some twenty-three long minutes when twelve would be ample and would materially improve it. The color background provided by Jo Mielziner's settings and Miles White's costumes helps effectively to etch the play as a whole into the audience imagination.

As the Julie of the Molnár-Hammerstein love story, Jan Clayton reveals herself as the best of the Hollywood escapists who have newly braved the musical stage in recent seasons. Shaw once wrote, "As virtuosity in manners was the characteristic mode of eighteenth century smart society, it follows that we get nothing of the eighteenth century at Her Majesty's except that from time to time the persons of the drama alarm us by suddenly developing symptoms of strychnine poisoning, which are presently seen to be intended for elaborate bows and curtseys." The average Hollywood actress, whether on the dramatic or the musical stage, usually alarms us by similarly betraying unmistakable and very realistic symptoms of catatonia complicated with a violent inflammation of the grin muscles, which are presently observed to be intended for volcanic sex appeal and buoyant *joie de vivre*. Miss Clayton is a relief. She comports herself like a normal young woman; she abstains from screwing up her features like a village idiot under the Hollywood impression that it will overwhelm an audience with its implication of bonhomie and jolly camaraderie; she acts simply and naturally and honestly; and she can sing.

The Liliom, or rechristened Billy Bigelow, of John Raitt, while vocally fair, relies altogether too much on the protrusion of a sweatered chest to depict the unquenchable

masculinity and bullying nature of the character. The rest of the troupe, while nothing calling for individual mention, is, however, in the main sufficient unto the occasion.

In sum, a show which might be paced more quickly to its advantage, which contains a little too much Agnes de Mille for comfort, and which misses some of the ironic enchantment of its original's purgatory and heaven episodes, but one which nevertheless is a cheering change from the more usual Broadway tuned-up merchandise.

COMMON GROUND. APRIL 25, 1945

A play by Edward Chodorov. Produced by Edward Choate for 69 performances in, first, the Fulton Theatre.

PROGRAM

AIDE	Arthur Gondra	2ND ITALIAN SOLDIER	Lou Gilbert
BUZZ BERNARD	Philip Loeb	3RD ITALIAN SOLDIER	Rupert Pole
KATE DEROSA	Nancy Noland	TED WILLIAMSON	Paul McGrath
GEEGEE (GENEVIEVE GILMAN)	Mary Healy	CAPTAIN ANGELINI	Luther Adler
NICK DEROSA	Joseph Vitale	COLONEL HOFER	Peter Von Zerneck
ALAN SPENCER	Donald Murphy		
1ST ITALIAN SOLDIER	J. Anthony Selba		

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Afternoon. Act II. A few minutes later. Act III. A few minutes later.

The action of the play takes place in the music-room of an old Italian castle, between afternoon and evening. The time is that period immediately preceding the capture of Naples.

THIS MARKS the author's third try in three successive years to rid himself of the spirochetes contracted in Hollywood and to write a reputable play. Two years ago, the microbes were still in powerful evidence in his *Those Endearing Young Charms*, which dealt with a virgin who defiantly bestowed her favors upon an Army flyer bound for the battle zone, but which wound up conventionally at Will Hays' marriage altar, inc. It amounted to little more than a motion picture acted out on a theatre stage. Last year, the bugs were only slightly less visible in his *Decision*, which had to do with a returned soldier's discovery that the seeds of Fascism were sprouting in his home town and with his high resolve at the final curtain's fall to stamp them out. Since the author's theme was simply another obvious rehash of the *It Can't Happen Here* idea and since his young hero was unintentionally presented as a cretin whose political eloquence consisted chiefly in the expression "O.K." and

whose general deportment suggested that he would have been more at ease on a horse yelling "Hi-yo, Silver!" the exhibit indicated that it in turn would have been more at ease in a film theatre. And now this year in *Common Ground* it is apparent that the purge remains still unsuccessful.

On this occasion, Mr. Chodorov employs a troupe of American mimes traveling in Italy as a USO unit and embracing a variety of races and paternal nationalities, along with its capture by the Nazis, to deliver himself of his testimonials to Americanism and Democracy, his exasperations anent anti-Semitism, his opinions of Hitler and Co., and the like. Though his sound track is in good, loud working order, what emanates from it is only what any number of playwrights have aired in past seasons, and for the most part, in view of the passing of time, with considerably more trenchant effect. His compound of denunciations and hornpipes, which suggests Elmer Rice in one of his less inspired moments, finds his audience much in the position of the Peter the Hermit about whom Shaw once wrote. A number of Crusaders on their way to battle the Paynim host encountered Peter sitting by the wayside and implored him to join them, but Peter politely declined. They wanted to know why. "I've been there," he replied simply. The audience has been at Mr. Chodorov's play before, and it has heard his harangues many times before; and it isn't interested.

The customary argument in such cases is that it does not matter how old materials are and that fresh treatment may make them again alive. The customary argument is true, but Mr. Chodorov unfortunately has not done anything about the fresh treatment. He has, in fact, done little more than to paste together elements of a dozen or more bygone plays like *Flight To The West*, *Idiot's Delight*, *Glorious Morning*, etc. — and including, as God is our judge, even a morsel from *Camille* — and to accompany the glue-pot with so many repetitious and dramaless speeches that one feels one is not in a theatre but at an indignation meeting in Carnegie Hall, simultaneously holding hands with Samuel Grafton and playing footie with Lillian Hellman.

Mr. Chodorov's conception of dramaturgy is very peculiar. His play consists for the greater part in a mere succession of dialogues at the right or left side of the stage with his disengaged characters standing or sitting about doing nothing but lowering their heads sympathetically or gazing at the speakers with intensely blank expressions presumably indicative of breathless fascination. And all to an obbligato of off-stage bomb-mimicking drums which give off the sound of a bad amateur performance of Ravel's "Bolero."

Various allusions to Darryl Zanuck, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and Twentieth Century-Fox are interspersed through the play in further testimony to its Hollywood genesis, which the author fondly, if unsuccessfully, hopes to conceal by including several self-consciously saucy animadversions on the morals and stupidity of that community.

As his own stage director, Mr. Chodorov permitted himself such an affection for his play's contents that he hovered lovingly over the worst of them and coddled them into extended snores. He evidently esteems his writing as an unbroken string of precious pearls and is loath to tamper with a single gem. Another director might have proved a sounder lapidary.

Two items in the evening provided some speculation. Laying pleased eyes on George Jenkins' setting of a ruined Italian castle, one wondered why it is that, while such interiors are often admirable, the backdrops of sea and hills seen through the rear windows almost always look as if they had been painted by Putzi Hanfstängl on his eighth birthday. Laying less pleased ears to Luther Adler's portrayal of an Italian captain, one further wondered why it was that the audience, as always, enthusiastically applauded a distinctly inferior performance simply because the actor, an American, had learned some lines in a foreign language, the wonder being increased when, upon his exit, another character exclaimed, "That was bad acting if ever I saw it!," and when the same audience thereupon gave itself to an uproarious, concurring laughter.

TOO HOT FOR MANEUVERS. MAY 2, 1945

A comedy by Les White and Bud Pearson. Produced by James S. Elliott for 21 performances in the Broadhurst Theatre.

PROGRAM

SERGEANT WALTER BURROWS	Dickie Van Patten	COLONEL BEDLOE	Lawrence Fletcher
SERGEANT REGGIE WINTHROP	Michael Dreyfuss	MAJOR STANLEY	Harry Antrim
CAPTAIN HAMILTON	Ronald Telfer	MR. WINTHROP	Fleming Ward
CORPORAL "EINSTEIN" SMETTS	Alastair Kyle	MRS. WINTHROP	Agnes Heron Miller
COLONEL STEVE HADLEY	Richard Arlen	MR. PERKLE	Harry Koler
AMY BURROWS	Helene Reynolds	PATSY LAVERNE	Eve McVeagh
CADET "WIMPY" WORTHINGTON	Billy Nevard	COUNTESS ROSINI	Ellen Andrews
ALEX	Arthur Hunnicutt	VERONICA	Sheila O'Malley
MAJOR PETERS	Jed Prouty	HILDA	Edith Leslie
		CADET No. 1	Roy Robson
		CADET No. 2	Marty Miller
		CADET No. 3	Pat O'Rourke

SYNOPSIS: Act I. Scene 1. *The headmaster's office, at Hadley Military Academy. 9 a.m. Saturday morning.* Scene 2. *The same, 1 p.m. Act II. Scene 1. The same, 9 p.m. Scene 2. The reception room at Countess Rosini's. 10 p.m. that night.* Act III. *The same as Act I. The following morning.*

The entire action takes place in and around Hadley Military Academy, near New York city, about fifty minutes from Pennsylvania Station. Time. Autumn, 1944.

ELLIOTT, a tender youth with a grim ambition to be a theatrical producer, presided over the concluding week of the 1942-1943 season with an item by Irving Elman called *The First Million*, which was judiciously evacuated from the stage after four performances. What was engaging his gifts in the concluding week of the 1943-1944 season, the records do not reveal. But in the concluding week of this 1944-1945 season he appeared again with an opus which, in respect to authorship and the presence in the cast of at

least two movie names, bore all the earmarks of Hollywood, both coming and going.

Concerned with boys at a military academy and the faculty's trials when a spurious Countess opens what is thought to be a euphemistic massage parlor hard by the premises, the transaction is a minestrone of elements derived from such military school comedies as *Brother Rat*, such strip farces as *Good Night Ladies*, such bordello musicals as *Early To Bed*, and a dozen or more of the kind of small budget movies that occupy the double feature bills in the small neighborhood theatres. The writing is of the film scenario species, and the characters are mainly the rubber-stamps indigenous to the routine plot. An intermittent spurt of humor enlivens the script, but the filler materials between laughs are strictly stogie.

Much of the acting, especially that of the cinema's Richard Arlen, additionally pestered the occasion.

The play was the thirty-sixth of the season equipped with the military uniform.

Especially Interesting Performances

ANNA LUCASTA

*Hilda Simms
Frederick O'Neal*

LOVE ON LEAVE

Bert Freed

SONG OF NORWAY

*Irra Petina
Helena Bliss
Sig Arno*

WHILE THE SUN

SHINES

*Melville Cooper
Cathleen Cordell*

SOLDIER'S WIFE

Glenn Anders

I REMEMBER MAMA

Oscar Homolka

SNAFU

Billy Redfield

EMBEZZLED HEAVEN

Martin Blaine

HARVEY

*Frank Fay
Josephine Hull*

SADIE THOMPSON

June Havoc

THE STREETS ARE

GUARDED

George Mathews

THE LATE GEORGE

APLEY
*Leo G. Carroll
Percy Waram
Margaret Phillips*

HAND IN GLOVE

Aubrey Mather

A BELL FOR ADANO

*Tito Vuolo
Albert Raymo
Charles Mayer*

THE SEVEN LIVELY

ARTS
*Beatrice Lillie
Alicia Markova*

LITTLE WOMEN

Mary Welch

DEAR RUTH

*Howard Smith
Virginia Gilmore*

SOPHIE

Marguerite Clifton

SING OUT, SWEET

LAND!

Burl Ives

TRIO

*Lois Wheeler
Richard Widmark*

THE HASTY HEART

John Lund

LA VIE PARISIENNE

Lillian Andersen

THE TEMPEST*Arnold Moss***ONE-MAN SHOW***John Archer***THE STRANGER***Eugene Sigaloff***THE DEEP MRS. SYKES***Catherine Willard***KISS THEM FOR ME***Judy Holliday***THE FIREBRAND OF****FLORENCE***Gloria Story***THE GLASS****MENAGERIE***Laurette Taylor**Eddie Dowling**Julie Haydon**Anthony Ross***CAROUSEL***Jan Clayton*

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